

## A CHANGE OF DIRECTION

The setting of this novel is the musical world of the nineteen-twenties, but the scene is no more than a backcloth for the theme of the book, which is self-discovery. This theme is implicit in the character and development of Lise Reinhart, a young singer drawn into her career as much by her own adolescent passion for a musician as by her mother's ambition and lack of scruple. Her upbringing has been divided between two sharply contrasting environments, the quiet provincial home of her foster-parents, the Yeos, where her natural simplicity and reticence take root, and the Bohemian, operatic world of her father, a famous bass singer, a world to which she is attracted by her own shallow ambition and the compulsion of first love. The novel, told in the first person by Lise herself, reveals the steps by which she is led to discover herself, and to accept the person she really is.

*Books by Mary Voyle*



**REMAINING A STRANGER  
A CHANGE OF DIRECTION**

# A CHANGE OF DIRECTION

*by*

MARY VOYLE



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NONE of the characters in this book is an actual portrait of a real person, whether living or dead, and any use of a real name is fortuitous. Lodmouth is easily recognisable, but I used a fictitious name in order to leave myself free for local inaccuracies. I dedicate the book to my mother, who knows that she is not the original of Madame Reinhart.



## A CHANGE OF DIRECTION

IT will probably seem strange to you that I never heard my famous father's voice more than a dozen times, except on gramophone records. There is a popular belief that the international artist takes his family around with him from city to city, so that his children acquire polyglot speech and manners, little education and a great deal of artistic temperament. This may be true in some cases but in my own it was not. I do not think that my father and mother cared for children or found them anything but a nuisance and an embarrassment, and it was for these negative and perhaps selfish reasons rather than from any regard for my welfare that they left me in England, almost from the time of my birth, to be brought up by foster-parents. Their meteoric course, which took them from the great European opera houses to the other end of the world, was made the more remote from my experience by the series of picture postcards which they sent me—of Sydney, Buenos Aires, Lima, Capetown. These cards, instead of bringing my parents nearer, emphasised their distance from me, and as I held one of the brightly-coloured, fictitious views in my hand, I sensed acutely the rolling waves between us, and the vast curve of the earth, over the distant rim of which they clung like ants on an upturned bowl. I almost wished they had not written and reminded me how far away they were. I was a happy and contented child, on the surface, but these postcards, with their cruel sunshine, their over-green grass,

and their grossly blue skies, brought into my life a temporary but recurrent discontent which never allowed me to give myself wholly to my environment.

The postcards were always covered with my mother's close handwriting and always they told me the same things: of my father's success, the ovations he received, the jealousy of his rivals (often, I subsequently learned, a fabrication of hers), the reception of the press, and—last but not least—her own standing as the great man's wife, usually satisfactory to herself, but occasionally, it seemed, below what should have been accorded to one in such a position. The letters (few) and the postcards (many) I was adjured to keep. *You will be proud of them one day*, was a frequent phrase, and there were more than veiled hints that I should hand them round among other people. My father had no better publicity agent than my mother.

My foster-parents were distant cousins. My father's name was German—it was originally spelt Reinhardt—and he was, in fact, partly German and partly Russian by birth, but on the German side of his family there had been, some three generations previously, a marriage with a west country English family called Yeo. A certain Mr. Edward Yeo, a watch-maker, had sent his son St. John to Germany to study German methods in the city of Nuremberg. Here he had met and married a German girl, Adela Reinhardt, and the connection had not ended there, for a child of this marriage, a girl, had returned to Germany to stay with her relatives, and married her first cousin, the Reinhardt who was my father's grandfather. For some reason the name Yeo delighted my father. He himself had been educated partly in England, had married an English wife, and spoke the language perfectly. He was extremely proud of his English blood. When I was a child he became a naturalised Englishman, although he made no attempt to change his name beyond dropping the d—his career precluded this. He used often to talk of his English blood, and of the Yeo family, and told several quite apocryphal stories about them. This

led in the end to his meeting someone who knew some Yeos, and eventually to the discovery that these Yeos were descendants of the same family who had married into his own. They were watch-makers in the country town of Lodmouth, and once my father had discovered them, he appropriated them. Deep down in my father, I believe there must have been something provincial and humdrum which was never to be allowed full satisfaction. He saw, perhaps, in Mr. Yeo, the skilled craftsman living a life of usefulness and contentment within a narrow orbit, the kind of man he would have liked to have been himself, if his own temperament and his wonderful vocal gift had not driven him into an artistic career.

Very soon after my birth, which took place in England, my father had to sing in Milan, and where to leave me while he carried out this engagement, at which it was unthinkable that my mother should not be with him, presented them both with a problem. My father attempted to solve it with characteristic unworldliness.

Let us give her to the Yeos, he suggested.

I have never discovered the exact terms of the response made by the Yeos to this offer. I only know that while they never adopted me legally, they did give me a home whenever my parents were away from England. From time to time, when they returned, I was taken out of seclusion and went to stay with them in London. I think they were, after all, very glad that they had not given me to the Yeos, for I was the family and provided an essential part of their London background, which they liked to make a contrast to their continental existence. England spelt domesticity to my father, and when here he erected a temporary home around him and stocked it with all that he considered necessary to the perfect English domestic circle. Thus he swiftly provided himself not merely with a house and furniture, but with servants, cats, dogs and finally a child, to give verisimilitude to his domestic hearth. It was all rather spurious, and I think he knew this. Occasionally he

escaped to stay a few days with the Yeos, when he became quite a different person, yet for all his striving he could never be a wholly natural father and family man.

One incident still stands out vividly in my memory. It took place not in Lodmouth, but in a London house which my parents took when I was about four years old, and my father was appearing at Covent Garden. My mother was out. My father and I were alone in the house, except for the servants in the basement. He came into my nursery and took me on his knee.

I'll tell you a story, he said, rather shyly.

Peter Rabbit, I demanded promptly. My father looked nonplussed.

No, not Peter Rabbit, he said. Alyosha and the little red bird of the woods.

No, I retorted. Peter Rabbit.

Obviously my father did not know the story of Peter Rabbit, but he did not say so.

Alyosha, he repeated. It is a very nice story. You will like it.

But I was not to be put off. Peter Rabbit, I begged, and became petulant. My father got red in the face, and insisted that it was to be Alyosha or nothing. Frightened, I began to cry, still begging through my tears for that terrible Peter Rabbit of which his upbringing had left him ignorant. We sat there, he angry, I tearful, and then, suddenly, he began to sing. He sang in a low voice in Russian, and the song went on and on, it seemed to me, for it disappeared into dreams, and I fell asleep on his knee. He never sang to me again, like this, nor did he ever make another attempt to tell me a story.

The visits to England never lasted very long, at most two or three months. Then servants would be dismissed, cats and dogs given away, the furniture sold, and the child, myself, returned like a doll to its bandbox, to Folliotts, the home of the Yeos in Lodmouth. My father and mother would disappear from my life and become again strange,

remote beings who sent me disturbing picture postcards from exotic, fairy-tale cities in whose real existence I hardly believed.

When I was ten, my parents returned to London for a longer spell than usual. My father was at this time at the very height of his fame and probably one of the greatest basses that have ever been heard on the operatic stage. A lull in his international engagements and a particularly tempting offer to sing Sarastro in *The Magic Flute* and other bass parts in the Covent Garden season of that year brought him to London. I was promptly called forth from my Lodmouth retreat and incorporated in the synthetic household he had created around him, this time in Bessborough Square. I hated the Pimlico houses. The district had about it a curiously lifeless air. The stucco of the buildings, even then when they were much newer, was peeling off, the pilasters and porticoes were cracked and dirty, while over the faded streets there hung an air of pinched gentility. I did not know why my father chose to live there. For me, it was a lamentable change from the fresh, bow-windowed houses of the seaside resort of Lodmouth, with its pretty gardens, and sunny esplanade, always alive with nursemaids and sailors and brass bands. In Pimlico no one more interesting than the milkman passed by, with his sad, drooping horse, followed by a procession of mangy cats. And within the house I was an alien, only made the more conscious of my otherness by being dragged into the limelight and exhibited as my father's child before groups of staring strangers. My parents were, it seems, at pains to prove the normalcy of their family life by this token of their domestic bliss.

My mother certainly played her part in the arrangement. Her business acumen made alliance with my father's sentimentality. In England the happy domestic circle is the best passport to the public's affection. Although these were the days before the glossy magazine, or the Sunday paper which swells its sales by publishing revelations on the private lives of public people, photographs of the family did appear in

papers like the *Illustrated London News*, and although they were more discreet and in better taste than those which might have appeared in magazines today, they had their effect and gave my father a standing in England which was quite independent of his artistic powers, and had about it a special quality denied to other, less domestic foreign artists. It was at this time that he became a naturalised Englishman and I think he would have settled permanently in England later on, if the war had not intervened.

It was during this season at Covent Garden that I first saw my father on the stage. He was playing the part of Sarastro. My mother and I sat in the stalls, from which I looked up at the stage, awe-struck, and regarded the whole performance as a glorified pantomime in which the serpent, the bird catcher, the subterranean caverns and the magic bells were mingled in delightful confusion. Of my father's part in the opera I had only the haziest conception, and indeed hardly recognised him in his bearded make-up, but of his lion-drawn chariot I had the vividest remembrance and talked of it endlessly afterwards.

Music did not make very much appeal to me. The voices which I heard reverberating through the house in Pimlico rather frightened me. It was an alarming house altogether. It had no associations for me. More than that—it had no atmosphere, no redolence or emanation of past happiness or contentment. Too many people had lived there. It had been too often emptied of furniture and living beings, and left to grow cold behind the notices *To Let*. The rooms were lofty and forbidding. I did not like to play in them, though frequently told to do so by my mother, who appeared to think that play came as naturally as breathing to a solitary child without toys. I would wander in the passages, walking from end to end of the house, half-afraid to open a door upon some silent room, and diverted only by pressing my face against the panes of the passage windows which looked out into the empty square, where at least there were trees to remind me of the walnut avenue at Folliotts, though no

rooks kept up their noisy parliament in the soot-encrusted branches. Always there seemed to hang over the Pimlico streets a veil of yellow atmosphere, which was reflected in the pale yellowish faces of the houses and cast over what might have been cheerful rooms an almost deathlike pallor.

Yet it was always to this district that my parents came on their visits to London. My father liked the respectability of the dingy squares, and I think my mother concurred in his choice, though for a different reason. She preferred to create her own bohemian circle, rather than join any already established artistic community such as might have been found in Chelsea. For several years their stays in London were more prolonged, often lasting several months, so I came to know the district intimately and thought that all London must be composed of stucco and basements and shabby porticoes.

In 1913 I spent Christmas with my parents in London, the first Christmas away from Lodmouth. It was very German and convivial and made me feel for the first time a part of my mother's and father's family. I remember one evening very clearly. We were having tea *en famille*—a rare occurrence, for the house was usually crowded with visitors, especially at meal times. It was late on a January afternoon, very cold and raw. The curtains were drawn and the fire blazing. My father and mother were sitting on either side of the marble mantelpiece and I was on a little footstool near my father's knee. We were silent, and that, too, was unusual. For almost the first time since I left Folliotts I felt something of the security and contentment I had been accustomed to in my foster-parents' house. I put out my hand timidly and rested it on my father's knee. He looked at me and smiled, a little uncertainly.

She's my own daughter, my own little girl, he said suddenly, as though he had only that moment discovered the fact, and he laid his hand over mine.

Stella, we've not done right. We should keep her with us.

My mother raised her eyebrows and, addressing me, asked

rather brusquely, You'd like to travel round Europe with your father and mother, Lise? Living in hotels and eating strange foreign foods?

I did not really comprehend all that was implicit in this question. I was conscious of the warmth of my father's hand on my own and of his puzzled, almost pleading blue eyes fixed on my face, and I made no answer to my mother, directly. Turning my head away, I said, I'd like to be with papa.

And so you shall, my little Lise, he said gently. It's time I made a home for you, and I will, God help me.

My mother laughed.

What a playboy you are, Marcus, she said. There's no keeping pace with your fancies. You'd be tired of her before a twelvemonth. An evening by the fire and a child's hand on your knee, and you're dreaming yourself into the perfect paterfamilias. But—no, Mark, tomorrow you will be Mephistopheles or Marcel, and where will the family tea-party be then? Leave the child alone. It's kinder so. You'll only upset her.

Out of all this—and do not think that I remembered the actual words of the conversation, for I did not; I found it all recorded in a diary which my father kept (alas, only for a few months)—out of all this, one word struck home to my heart, the word alone. I began to cry. My father pushed me away and I heard him say a strange thing—a thing I did remember and never found in the diary——

I am your puppet, Stella. Jerk the strings and I move.

In my confused mind, I saw my father, like a figure in the Punch and Judy shows I had so often seen on the pier at Lodmouth, standing before the curtains in his role as Sarastro, bowing, bowing up and down, a mere animated puppet bowing, kissing his hands to the gallery, and disappearing like the hangman or the policeman behind the vast red curtains of the proscenium. My mother left the room. The harmony was gone. The fire was no longer cheerful, nor the light of the gas candelabra so glowing. My father's

empty chair (for he had risen and followed my mother), the cold tea in his cup, and the draught which stirred the curtains combined to chill me and send me off to bed early, where I cried myself to sleep.

My father did not again refer to that conversation, but I thought sometimes that I observed him looking at me with increased tenderness. This, however, only embarrassed me and made me long to return to Folliotts, where no one asked me strange unanswerable questions, or looked at me either with intensity or with indifference, but only with a calm, unaltering affection.

April came and my mother was anxious to get my father abroad again to sing at Dresden for a short season before returning to Italy, where they usually spent the autumn. I viewed their imminent departure with mixed feelings. In one way I was glad. I loved Folliotts and hated London, and my environment made a deep impression on me and awoke repugnance or devotion far more readily and vehemently than personal relationships. Yet something in this London life—perhaps nothing more than its meretricious attractions of success, adulation and publicity—made me reluctant to leave it. Though I lived only on the fringes of it and longed intensely at times to run away from it, I also longed to plunge deeply into it, to identify myself with it.

One afternoon, my father found me, as I so often was, wandering in one of the gloomy passages, in the yellow Pimlico light, discontented and vaguely frightened by the closed doors which hemmed me in on every side. I was attempting to amuse myself by tiptoeing down the passage, giving a resounding rap at each door as I passed, as if to turn the tables on my unseen enemies within by giving *them* a fright. Hearing the noise, my father had come upstairs, and unknown to me stood watching my performance. He stared at me with a sad, half-pitying intentness. Perhaps he wondered if he had begotten a natural.

Is that all you have to do? he asked.

Yes, I answered, sullenly.

You want to go back to Lodmouth, don't you, Lise?

I made no reply.

You are fond of Mr. and Mrs. Yeo—fonder perhaps than you are of Mama and me?

I could not answer that question either, for duty contended in my breast with inclination. I stood stiffly, pulling myself away a little from his encircling arm.

He sighed.

You shall go back, he said.

The finality of it struck me like a wave. The knowledge that I was not, after all, to live with my parents endeared them to me instantly. Even the drab, sallow house took on a more friendly air. I recalled little incidents, kindly words from a servant, shopping expeditions with my mother, a sunny morning spent playing dominoes in the window of my bedroom, while the empty square was flushed with thin January sunshine and errand boys whistled cheerfully as they passed. But something more than these tugged at my heart and made the prospect of return less joyful to me than I would have believed. In London I was left alone very often, except for the governess who came in every morning to teach me for three hours. In the afternoon I was left to my own devices more often than not. Now that I was older I would sometimes creep into the music-room and listen to my father rehearsing, or to the talk of his friends. Timid though I was of this bizarre world of opera, and unappreciative musically, something of its fascination had touched me. The fact that my father was a great singer, so admired, so sought after, was of secondary importance to me. I had no standards of comparison, and did not at the time realise how great a singer he was. But the atmosphere which was created round him, the noise, the laughter, the talk in foreign tongues, the open-heartedness of the embraces, the handshakes, the toasting and confused hospitality not merely of the house but of the heart, all this had begun to exert a spell over me, and now that I was to be deprived of it I suddenly realised that it had a value for me. I longed to be of that world, and

in my imaginings I was of it, though in reality my shyness and timidity, coupled with a growing consciousness of my lack of education and want of manners, kept me from making any attempt to claim a place in it as the daughter of a famous singer. These imaginings, these vague, half-formed longings and dissatisfactions within myself were a disturbance, a fermentation of the dormant soil of my mind. In the long hours when, aware of little else but loneliness and boredom which I attributed consciously to my exile from Lodmouth, I would wander in the passages or gaze from the windows into the silent square, or when I stood silent amid the brilliant galaxy of artists, critics and admirers who surrounded my father, confused by the babel of talk, embarrassed by the sudden notice which would sweep over me like the beam of a searchlight, illuminating me for a moment and then leaving me to darkness again, my spirit was being ploughed up ready to receive the seed of ambition which my mother was to encourage and foster. I realised suddenly that in leaving London I was leaving an environment in which, potentially, I had an important position, and returning to one where I was not more than a member of a family, and a schoolgirl among schoolgirls.

I don't want to go back, I said to my father and mother later that evening. I have thought about it, and I don't want to go back.

He looked uncomfortable.

It's all arranged now, he said.

Can't you alter it? I asked, fearful of losing what I had only just found.

He looked at my mother, but she shook her head.

We really can't take Lise all over Europe. There's her education to consider, said my mother.

You see, said my father. There's schooling to be thought of.

But I don't go to school when I am in London with you, I pointed out, with childish logic.

You have a governess, said my mother.

Couldn't she come with us?

No, Lise, don't go on at your father about it. It's no use. It's not a life for a child.

My father took my hand. Next year, he said. Next year, we'll come back to Covent Garden, and I'll buy a house. We'll stay here. Next year.

In the few bitter days between the final announcement, with its, to me, empty promise, and my actual departure, I began to create for myself a synthetic personality. It was not so much an armour—all children have that—but something more positive. I was determined to re-enter my foster-parents' home as a person in my own right—it did not occur to me that they had always considered me that—not merely as my father's child, a distant cousin, but as Lise Reinhart, embryo opera singer. I would make it appear that my future was of my own choosing, that I had deliberately preferred to return to Lodmouth to finish my education, rather than accompany my parents to the Continent, and that in time I would return to them and take up my proper career.

I wonder how I appeared to the Yeos when I stepped out of the train that spring morning in 1914. I will try to describe myself as I think I must have looked. I was thirteen years old, nearly fourteen. My face was pale after living in London throughout the winter. My hair was almost black and scraped back from my white, rather rounded forehead. I was plump and self-conscious of my plumpness, strangely dressed in a coat with an astrakhan collar and cuffs, bought in Paris for me, while on my feet were boots which, ten or fifteen years later, were to become popular but which in 1914 only provoked stares, Russian boots, and real Russian boots, too, for my father had bought them in Cracow. I had a little muff, also of astrakhan, and a little Russian cap. But more, perhaps, than by my outlandish appearance must the Yeos have been struck by the new tone in my voice, which had acquired a certain loudness, in an effort to cover my inner shrinking and timidity. With my rather missish features and foreign clothes, my aggressive voice and affected manners

added a final touch to my incongruities and it was an oddly-compounded little girl who stepped out of the train at Lodmouth. My character and personality were as ill-assorted. By nature silent and retiring, as they had always known me, I was now resolved to show myself a member of an artistic circle of which, in fact, I knew next to nothing but its superficialities, and I had stocked my mind with phrases which I had heard bandied about my head in the Pimlico house. Inwardly lonely and bitter at my parents' abandonment of me, secretly dreading the rigours of real school which lay before me—for I was to go to the High School now—convinced of my lack of education and *savoir faire*, I had nevertheless taken my resolve, and I possessed in a highly-developed form the child's capacity to transform what is immediate to it into practical use—that capacity which in early years transmutes a wooden spoon into a doll, or a cupboard into a cave, and which later casts over well-known surroundings, a garden, or a shrubbery or a street, the attributes of some desired scene—Camelot, or Treasure Island, or the Athenian wood.

Alas, that it was not into these fruitful, beneficent channels that I directed my childish powers. I had outgrown such humble material as the wooden spoon. It is one of the clearest signs that innocence is left behind when a child's imagination ceases to play around the commonplace and trivial things, and selects for its material some personal disability or impediment, some inner unhappiness, some crack in the bowl of its security, and over this exercises its capacity for invention and make-believe, attracting to itself the adult qualities of cunning, expediency and deceit in order to conceal and mislead, rather than enhance and transform the familiar.

Such was I at this time. My solitariness was converted in the crucible of my mind into an attitude of superiority. My abandonment by my parents heightened the courage of my resolve into an assumed heroism against a hostile world and if I felt an inferiority to my friends in education, it was com-

pensated for by exaggerating my artistic superiority. It was therefore hardly an attractive child who entered the Folliotts household in the early months of 1914.

I think I puzzled the Yeos. They found it difficult to reconcile the arrogance and stupidity of my conversation with the nervous, shy little girl who had left them the winter before. With less understanding and forbearance I must have become intolerable indeed, but Mr. and Mrs. Yeo, and their sons, Clement and Edward, were the best people who could have been found to normalise and cement my fragmentary and immature personality. The Yeos had their roots well established, and their sturdy stock was a shelter to those who like myself had reason to claim it. The family was not brilliant. I heard at Folliotts none of the flashing talk which had dazzled me in London. Yet the Yeos were as expert in their particular field as my father in his, and possessed the single-mindedness and integrity of true artists. The whole family was devoted to and intimately connected with the old family business which had stood in the High Street for a hundred and fifty years. To them it was a heritage to be passed on to future generations, a heritage of good workmanship and honest dealing. It was a growing thing, like a plant. In London I had sometimes been ashamed of my connection with shop-keeping relatives, but my father often spoke of the Yeos to his friends with pride. Once he said of them, *They are artists*, and I blushed for him, but when I was older I knew that he had spoken the truth.

Gradually, in the even temperature of that environment, my artistic pretensions withered and went underground into their tenuous roots. That summer I went to the High School and began to acquire a smattering of book-learning and a grooming of conventional behaviour. But my real education was at Folliotts. Most important of all, instead of my returning to my parents the following winter, when I should have refortified my resolve, and perhaps, indeed, induced my father to carry out his half-formed plan to keep me with him in future, the war intervened and separated me from them.

There were no more visits to Pimlico. My father and mother were in Stuttgart when war was declared. Both were convinced that Germany and England would never go to war, and when the Kaiser invaded Belgium, they refused to return to England with the majority of the British community. My mother, on the very eve of the war, wrote to me:

My dearest Lise, you must not be worried on our account. The papers in England are going mad. Out here quite a different atmosphere prevails. There is no panic, no war-mongering. Your father gave a superb performance of Sarastro last night. I don't know when I heard him sing better. The critics are beside themselves with praise. In the cafés this morning I heard more talk of your father's singing, believe me, than of war or rumours of war. Your father is anxious for you to join us in Switzerland for Christmas. We will have a splendid holiday, dear Lise, and you shall learn to skate. Your father is a beautiful skater, you know. It is wonderful to watch him. But he is a wonderful man, isn't he?

My mother was never able to resist advertising my father. She never forgot that she was his chief publicity agent. But war did break out and the next I heard of my parents was that they were interned in Bavaria. I think life was made as pleasant for them as it could be, despite the fact that my father had only recently become a naturalised Englishman. Once war was proclaimed he declared an ardent patriotism for the country of his adoption, and refused to sing, though I believe the German authorities offered him generous terms of parole if he would continue to appear in the roles which had made him famous. For my parents the war years must have passed wearily indeed, and sadly too, with their divided allegiance. I wrote to them, of course, and sent them parcels, but my heart withdrew further and further from them. I was completely assimilated into the Folliotts household, and in that temperate environment my personality had room to grow. I began to shed what was extraneous and assumed. I

put out new roots and strengthened the fibres of my being. I did not lose altogether those meretricious artistic aspirations which I had acquired in London but they shrank to negligible proportions in a soil so unfavourable to their growth. And during those four years of war when I grew from a child to a girl of seventeen, I acquired tastes, habits and an attitude of mind which were in fact a reinforcement of my natural instincts, and were in the end to prove stronger and more enduring than all that Pimlico and my later and nearly disastrous sojourn there with my mother were to teach me.

What do I remember of the war years? Very little. Mr. Yeo—Uncle Tim, I called him—crying over the death of his elder son, Clement, and the sudden stillness of Folliotts. Edward in his O.T.C. uniform parading on the front; Australian soldiers with their lean, sunburnt faces, and ugly accents; German soldiers working on the roads; a young Siamese boy, a school-friend of Edward's, who loved me dearly and taught me to sing, "They'll never believe me"—a host of disconnected memories, punctuated by letters from my parents, telling me of a life so different from our own that they might have been living on another planet. Folliotts was now so much my home that I do not think I seriously envisaged seeing my parents again, and I believe I secretly dreaded the cessation of hostilities which would make it necessary for me to do so.

Kind though Mr. and Mrs. Yeo were, I was not outwardly very affectionate towards them. I realise now that circumstances prevented me from being a very demonstrative person. My parents had not inspired in me the kind of childish love which is natural, yet my stay at Folliotts was interrupted too frequently for me to convert the Yeos into parents. The loss of Clement, moreover, rather early in the war, made them reserved and silent and I was thrown very much into the company of Edward. Then he too joined up, and beneath the quiet Folliotts life ran a tremor of anxiety, quickened at every knock of the postman. Yet, strangely

enough, it was I who received a telegram. It stated that information had been given from German sources that my father had been killed in a train accident in western Germany.

Three months later the war was over, and on a cold evening in early December I went to London to meet my mother. Edward, who was on leave, took me up to Waterloo and conveyed me in a taxi to Victoria. The station was crowded with people and we stood forlornly at the barrier, without speaking. Around us was a throng of happy, eager faces, each one anxiously on the watch for some sweetheart, husband or son returning from France. A woman near me looked shyly into my face and murmured, her eyes full of tears, Wonderful, isn't it? Home at last. I can't believe it till I see him.

I turned away from her to Edward. I wished I could share her emotion, the emotion of the crowd. I would have liked to be waving a flag, or crying for happiness. Instead I looked blankly at my companion and in all that waiting crowd ours must have been the only hearts on which a chill was laid. I think both of us knew that we had come to the end of a chapter. We saw the nose of the train rounding the corner. The crowd surged forward, carrying us with it.

I'll go now, said Edward. He was pressed close against me, and I put my arm round his neck, suddenly desolate at the thought of his departure.

Good-bye, Edward. Oh, Edward, I do so wish we were going back to Folliotts.

I wish we were, he said, not moving. You'll come and see us, won't you?

Of course. I don't suppose my mother will want me to live with her anyway.

No one took any notice of us. The crowd was frenzied, shouting and waving and crying hysterically. In the midst of it all, we stood silently, not knowing what to say. Edward kissed my cheek, and then extricated himself from the crowd, to disappear quickly down the dim, foggy platform.

In front of me the train disgorged its mass of humanity.

There was a moment when the whole side of the train seemed to melt and a mass of brown lava pour out on to the platform, sending up into the roof a cloud of steam which wreathed around the flaring lamps and made them appear like luminous suns in a fog. The close-packed khaki mass disintegrated into moving, gesticulating forms, in which floated individual faces, a red face, grinning widely, an anxious haggard face, peering from a deep-peaked cap, a youthful face, smiling a nervous smile and murmuring what must have been words of endearment long before he was within earshot. The crowd around me surged forward on a wave of recognition, and the two masses met in a delirious eddy of reuniting. Then I saw my mother. Like me, she was motionless, in the midst of the oncoming crowd. I realised that for her the task of recognition might be a difficult one and I moved towards her. As I approached, I saw that she was not alone, that she was speaking to someone, a tall, fair, youngish man in civilian clothes, standing beside her. She looked, I thought, very changed. I put myself deliberately in her gaze, and saw recognition transform her face as though someone had wiped a sponge over it, removing a theatrical disguise. Then, as swiftly, the mask was reassumed and, smiling and waving, she pushed her way towards me, her hands extended, and cried:

Lise—at last—my little Lise! and she folded me in her embrace. Over her shoulder I saw the civilian gentleman looking at the scene with interest. But he did not move away. For an instant our eyes met, but his expression did not change. He might have been observing our reunion with an eye to reporting on it to some newspaper. My mother held me at arm's length, exclaimed on my growth, praised my appearance, kissed me again, and so overwhelmed me with her demonstration that I felt discomforted and embarrassed. I was unused to caresses or displayed emotions.

Now you must meet Felix, she cried at last, and I was led over to the little pile of suitcases over which my mother's companion was presiding. He looked down at me from his

considerable height, with an unsmiling and intent gaze. My mother took my hand.

I want you to meet Felix Harradine, a fellow prisoner like myself. Darling Lise, I don't think I should be here, I don't think I should be living but for him.

The man took my hand, but turned the curiously fixed, intent gaze of his eyes upon my mother.

You exaggerate, Stella, he said, in a low voice.

She gave him a smile of such warmth and intimacy that I found myself blushing. I had not heard grown-up people address each other in these somewhat theatrical terms, and I had certainly never surprised between any members of the Yeo family a look which expressed so nakedly the emotions of the being behind the face. Myself in the stage of hero-worship, I felt certain that Felix must have saved my mother's life on some occasion, and he took on the stature of a Galahad.

Where are you staying? asked my mother. I answered that I was staying nowhere, that Edward Yeo had brought me to London and escorted me to the station, but nothing had been done to secure rooms at an hotel, as we had thought my mother would have written to one of those where she had stayed with my father.

You don't understand, my dear Lise. I have been virtually a prisoner of war. How could I write booking rooms at a London hotel? And how should I even know of any?

The ones you used to stay in with Papa, I said.

All bombed, she answered with finality. Bombed or burnt.

Oh, no, I cried.

Are they not? (she turned to Mr. Harradine). We were told so, weren't we?

He nodded.

I'm afraid it wasn't true, I said, flatly. There was very little damage done as far as I know.

It was all becoming more and more unreal to me, this conversation under the yellow glow of the station roof. Our

faces had a curiously luminous appearance, as though we were lit up from within, yet there was no warmth in our eyes. We had each of us left our own worlds behind us, and met in a kind of no man's land. We were almost alone on the platform now, except for the porters who were still getting out the luggage from the vans. The train was in darkness, its carriage doors swinging open to reveal their black, tenantless state.

Felix will see to it all, won't you? (My mother turned to the young man in appeal). Find us an hotel. You will remember the names. I remember nothing. That old life is a blank—a complete blank.

Felix picked up the suitcases. I thought his face extraordinarily immobile. It was impossible to tell what he was thinking. He found a taxi and put us into it. Then he stood for a moment at the door, apparently in thought.

I leave it entirely to you, Felix. Just find us a roof for our heads. Somewhere we can talk and rest, somewhere quiet—for Lise and me.

My mother half leaned out of the cab to say this to him, and as she sat back again I saw the smooth, expressionless face alter slightly. The eyes, wide open and faintly questioning, looked in at my mother, there was a slight movement of the mouth and nostrils. Then he turned to the driver.

Take us to the Courtauld Hotel, he said. Somewhere near Gordon Square. I'm afraid I can't remember the exact street.

Then he got into the taxi, and sat down on one of the little seats opposite my mother and me.

For some time we drove in silence through the dark streets. Then I plucked up the courage to ask a question which had been on my mind for some days.

Why didn't you accept Mrs. Yeo's invitation, Mother? I asked.

What? To go down to Lodmouth? Oh, my dear. I couldn't. It was kind of her, of course, but it would have been impos-

Oh, why, Mother? I would have liked you to see them again.

I should like to see them, replied my mother vaguely, but not now, darling Lise. It would be—very difficult. There are things I have to see to in London.

She put her hand over mine and every now and again she stroked it or gave it a closer clasp. I sat as far back in my corner as I could. I thought how different it would have been if we had now been driving to Waterloo to catch the Lodmouth train, if it had been Edward who was sitting opposite us, not this strange Felix Harradine. The driver stopped to ask the way, and my mother leaned across to Felix and asked him where he was going to spend the night.

I shall go to the Vandyck, he answered, after a momentary hesitation. I will telephone you in the morning.

Yes, telephone me, early, said my mother. We shall be so helpless, Lise and I. We shall depend on you entirely, Felix, unless (she turned to me) unless my little daughter will take care of her poor shattered mother? Yes, Lise, I have to look to you a great deal now. It is you who will be the strong one.

I was horribly embarrassed and felt an overwhelming urge to draw myself away from human contact. I pulled my hand from under my mother's glove, and rubbed it against my mouth and cheek. I could think of nothing to say. Suddenly I heard Felix, who had leaned across towards my mother, say in a low voice, You are affected, Stella, and the child knows it. Be yourself, for God's sake.

I was astonished. I stared at the man who had said this to my mother and then at my mother herself. He was sitting back, his face turned to the window to see where we were going, and my mother was motionless, with her hands, in their grey gloves, tightly clasped in her lap. I could hardly believe what I had heard. This stranger had spoken to her with authority, as if she had disgraced him in public.

We arrived in a few moments at the hotel. It smelt strongly of soup and stale greens, and was a cheerless place, much given to dark red wallpaper. My mother and I were

shewn into a double bedroom. A single low-powered bulb hung from the ceiling and cast a faint and dismal light upon the heavy wardrobe and dressing-table, and the two beds with their pink cotton covers. I was depressed and nervous. I had never shared a room with anyone before and my mother seemed almost a stranger to me. Even my memories of her did not bear relation to the woman who had talked so strangely to me at the station and in the cab, and had provoked that curious remark from Felix Harradine. I sat down on the bed, at a loss what to do. My mother began to unpack her suitcase. I suppose she was inwardly as embarrassed as I was and could think of nothing to say now that we were alone.

We ate an execrable meal downstairs, hardly speaking to each other, and when we rose to leave the dining-room my mother said suddenly, Let's go for a walk, Lise. Remember, I haven't seen London for years.

We put on our coats and hats and went out into the cold December night air. Big drops of moisture glistened on the ironwork of the lamps and on the rails in front of the houses. A wall, as we brushed against it, was running with damp. The lighting of the streets was poor and I could hardly see my mother's face. The rhythm of walking soothed us both and necessity brought us together, at road crossings and on the crowded pavements. We walked arm-in-arm at last and my mother began to talk to me more freely, more like her old self. She spoke in a firm, precise manner. With every step she took, she seemed to be acclimatising herself. She recognised landmarks and greeted them with affection and enthusiasm. She was always a practical, capable woman, and now that the shock of return had begun to wear off, she was already busy with schemes for the future.

Do you know what was worst of all, Lise? she said suddenly. It was having so little money. When one has no money, one becomes dependent.

This set me thinking. How were we to live? I had no knowledge of my father's financial situation. However, I

was soon to be enlightened. My mother told me that my father had at her instigation built up substantial funds in England over which she would now, after certain legal formalities, have full control. We should be comfortably off, and soon she would gather round her the old friends and artistic connections she had not seen for so many years. They will want to hear about your father, she said. And what of me? She did not wish me to return to Folliotts. My education was over. We would live together in a London house and later on we would discuss what I was to do with my life. She had hopes. She had plans. I felt miserable and apprehensive at this. What could I do or be? I remembered my old resolve. It seemed very foolish and remote to me now.

We had taken a bus down to Victoria and walked for a while amid the streets in which I had last lived with my parents. Now, on this wintry night, many of the houses empty and exposing to the intermittent lamplight their blank, uncurtained windows, it all looked profoundly melancholy and deserted, and in the dark patches between the lamps sinister and often hideous shadows stained the sallow walls. I longed bitterly for Folliotts, for Edward, for everything that had spelled security for me during my four years at Lodmouth. But, far from evoking melancholy in my mother, or setting up in her mind a train of sad reminiscence, these spectral houses, where the iron railings were rusting and the stucco peeling from the leprous yellow façades, only roused her to remark with energy:

We must come down and see an estate agent tomorrow.

We left Pimlico and walked down the Embankment. I think we were both tired, so we rested against the stone parapet and looked down into the black, oily water heaving below. My mother was being very practical. She was outlining a scheme for obtaining loans from her friends to tide us over till the settlement of my father's will could be obtained. Under the light of the lamp above us, her face was bright and eager. It was the old face, birdlike, with narrow

nose and dark, bright eyes. It had aged, of course, but there was the same air of alertness and penetration, almost a predatory air, like a hawk's. Yet she had a certain beauty, springing chiefly from her vivacity. This kind of practical talk suited her. It was easier to like her when she was herself. Suddenly she said:

You must wonder who Felix is.

Yes, I said. I was wondering. Shall we be seeing him again?

I think, said my mother with deliberation, watching my face, I think that he will come and live with us.

Obvious inferences were not for me. I had not the background or worldly knowledge in which they would have burgeoned naturally and spontaneously. I was mildly puzzled, faintly curious, but no more. Acceptance was in my nature.

We got on to a bus and started the homeward journey to the hotel. The bus was intolerably hot after the cold air outside. My head swam rather and I hardly heard what my mother was saying to me. I was asleep when we got back to Bloomsbury.

The following morning, it seemed no time to press upon her questions I still longed to ask, and which, perhaps, she had answered the night before while I dozed in the bus against her shoulder. She was up early—had dressed before I was awake, and was planning the day while I struggled to wash the sleep out of my eyes with cold water from a dusty china jug. The tiny can of hot water had been emptied by my mother. Soon after breakfast there came a knock at the door and my mother was summoned to the telephone. She came back, looking flushed and angry.

How intolerable these hotel telephones are, she said. There is no privacy whatever. The porter simply stood beside me, listening without shame to every word I spoke. Disgraceful!

Who was it? I asked timidly.

Who was it? Why, Felix of course. Who else knows we are here? He is on his way round here now. He had an

unspeakable night, poor boy. The wallpaper was infested with bugs. Bugs! What a country we have come back to!

She looked at me and burst out laughing.

Oh, don't look so—so—my little Lise—so like a frightened dormouse. You must get used to me. I don't mean anything even when I storm. We are going to love each other, you and I. You are really quite pretty, Lise. It will be a pleasure to introduce you to my friends. And we must plan, mustn't we?

She looked at me thoughtfully and then added, in measured words:

But I wonder, now, what can you do?

I said nothing. Still lurking in the back of my mind was that old resolve, but my mother daunted me. I could never have suggested to her that I should follow in my father's footsteps.

We dressed ourselves in our outdoor clothes and waited in an unheated lounge at the front of the hotel for Felix. My mother stood restlessly at the window gazing through the dingy net curtains and playing incessantly with the acorns of the blind, which tapped with maddening reiteration against the window-panes and sounded preternaturally loud in the empty room, the emptiness only emphasised for me by my mother's presence in it, for she was so withdrawn from me, so self-absorbed in her watching, that I could feel my own loneliness washing up against me like a tide. I sat on a black slippery settee and turned my thoughts to Folliott's. Breakfast would be over now. Edward would be taking the dogs out over the edge of the frosty marsh. Mr. Yeo would be setting out for his shop in the High Street. Mrs. Yeo would be in the kitchen to give cook her orders. The house would be warm, and alive about its daily business like a well-wound clock.

Here he comes, said my mother, and hurried to the door. The porter answered the bell, and Felix and my mother met in the hall, while I remained standing in the so-called lounge uncertain whether to go out to them or not.

Come along, called my mother peremptorily and we went out together, after a brief greeting from Felix. He hailed a cab and we all got in.

Where to? he asked.

Romford Place.

No, no, we can't go there, expostulated Felix.

Why not? He would do anything for my husband.

We are not your husband, said Felix coldly. And it is unpleasant to be rebuffed.

Make up yer mind, interposed the taxi-driver with good humour.

Felix leaned through the door of the cab towards my mother and spoke in a low voice: It's ready money we need, not sympathy, and you suggest going to the shabbiest music-seller in London.

Give me credit for knowing Max a little better than you. There is no lack of money there or I shouldn't have suggested him. I am more practical than you give me credit for, Felix. We are not in Germany now.

And your daughter, he pursued. What is she to do while we talk to him?

We? My dear Felix, you are not going to talk to him.

Come on, said the driver impatiently. Where d'yer want to go?

My mother tapped on the window and he opened it an inch. Romford Place, W.C.1, she said.

Felix climbed into the cab and sat down with a very sulky expression on his face. My mother put her hand on his knee.

Don't be so cross, Felix, she said.

It's such a damnable waste of time, he answered petulantly. There's so much to do.

I know, I know. Do you think I want to delay a moment? You have your work to do. But you must trust me, Felix. I know where the money is, like a water diviner, I know it.

A water diviner, eh? He looked at her with an extraordinary expression of impudence mingled with admiration.

Out with the rod, then, Stella, and may it twist in your hand soon. God knows, we need it.

It was all quite unintelligible to me. Moreover, I could see no necessity for my presence. Why, I asked myself, had I not been left in Lodmouth, at least until my mother's affairs were settled? Yet for me that morning was to be of the greatest importance.

The music shop of Max Hofenstahl (though he called himself Heppenstall on the signboard) was behind one of London's oldest and grimmest theatres. The taxi put us down at a small alley by the stage door, and my mother paid the driver, to my surprise. I had never seen a woman paying for a man before in any circumstances. She and Felix went quickly into the alley, leaving me to follow them, rather bewildered. It led into a dismal, dripping yard, a kind of well at the back of the theatre and on one wall was a fire-escape staircase of rusty iron leading to a door on the first storey. A filthy window-pane gave out a faint orange glow and the words

#### MAX HEPPENSTALL—MUSIC

appeared on a board at the side of the door, fairly newly painted. At the bottom of the staircase my mother hesitated.

I must see him alone, Felix, she said. Don't come up.

What am I to do, then?

Take Lise into a café. I saw one on the corner over there. Go and have some coffee and I'll join you there.

Felix hesitated, and seemed put out. My mother repeated again:

No, Felix, you had better not come. You are too obvious. You will offend the old man. We need his help.

Felix shrugged his shoulders.

All right, he acquiesced. All right, Stella.

My mother seemed more her old self. She was no longer talking of her dependence on Felix or me. We watched her climb up the iron staircase and push open the door of the shop. Then Felix turned to me.

Let's hope she is successful, he said, with a preoccupied stare.

Left alone with him, I felt miserable. Knowing nothing whatever about him, and in any case quite unused to talking to strange males, I dreaded the next half-hour, and was only too glad to bury my face in a cup of coffee. Moreover I was not put at my ease by Felix's appraising stare, as though I were a piano or some other inanimate object.

He said suddenly, just as we were finishing our first cup of coffee:

You're not at all like your mother to look at, are you?

I don't know, I said.

No, not a bit like her. Nor very like your father, either.

I did not know what to say to this.

You never lived with your parents much, I believe?

No.

Now that raises an interesting point. I believe environment does have an effect not merely on character but on appearance. Who are these people you lived with?

The Yeos?

Is that their name? Yeo? Extraordinary name.

It's a west country name. They live at Lodmouth.

Relations?

Very distantly.

Are you like them? I mean, to look at?

I—I don't know a bit. No, I don't think so.

Well, I believe you are. I believe you've grown like them. Don't look so frightened about it.

He stared at me with his wide-open eyes.

It's nothing to be ashamed of. Perhaps it's an improvement.

To my relief he switched the subject to himself.

This question of environment, now. D'you think I am very Teutonic?

I don't think anything about it.

Oh, come, you must have met some Germans surely, before the war?

I'm too young to remember them. Well, yes, I suppose I did meet a few, but I don't know whether you're like them, Mr. Harradine.

Felix. You mustn't call me Mr. Harradine. I'm a kind of brother, you know.

Oh.

Yes, a kind of brother, I think. Anyway, what were we talking of? Of environment. Yes, indeed, I think I've grown very Teutonic. Of course, I was fair to start with, and then my hair has been cut in the German fashion for four years, which makes a difference.

I thought this rather absurd and started to laugh. He laughed too and his little blond moustache lifted to reveal white, even teeth.

You laughed, he said. Delightful. I thought you never would. Now, tell me, what do you know about me? Do my other attributes seem as absurd to you?

I don't know anything else, I answered truthfully.

Ah, well, he said. There is little else to know. I am a musician, a composer, who went to Germany to study, and was caught when war started. I was interned, of course, and in 1916 they moved me to a Bavarian castle they were using for some of the internees. They treated us very well on the whole, you know—and there I met your mother—and, of course, your father, he added as an afterthought, which struck me as very strange for surely it was my father who was to be remembered first?

There's the history, he wound up.

I was curious. It was such a bald, rather dull tale.

Couldn't you tell me any more? I was bold enough to ask, but Felix was no longer communicative.

Tell me, he began, seriously, is there much prejudice against the Germans over here?

I don't know. There was in Lodmouth.

Really? How ignorant. But how typical. They are, of course, a very great people, the Germans. I shall cultivate my Teutonism. Have I a trace of an accent, do you think?

A little.

Good.

Oh, no, I objected. I think you will find it puts people against you.

Not in the musical world, he replied gently. One must have style, a—a line. I must make a virtue of my four years' imprisonment. That should not in any case be difficult, for it brought me inestimable advantages in the friendship of your parents.

I wanted to ask him to tell me more about my father, but he went on rapidly, Really, you're quite a little *fräulein* yourself, in features. I suppose it is your father's German blood. If you plaited your hair upon your head, now.

But I don't particularly want to look like a *fräulein*.

You don't? Well, don't look so downcast. I was only teasing. I'm sure we're going to be excellent friends. It's as well, for we're going to see a lot of each other. And so for a start, I'll tell you something—I . . . like . . . you . . . very . . . much.

He drew the words out, and as he said them he gazed very fixedly at me, to see my reaction. No doubt it was just what he expected. I blushed.

Do you think you will like me? he went on.

I—I expect so.

Good. You see, we are going to live in the same house and *Stellchen* will look after us both, guide us, inspire us, scheme for us—and, like two meteors, we will soar into the sky (his arm swept upwards). She has plans for you, and plans for me, plans like wings. Will you think of me as a brother?

I will try, I answered, thinking that this would be extremely difficult. But I don't think there is any plan for me. You—you will have to be the meteor.

How absurd the words sounded. I felt almost as though I were on a stage mouthing a part. But Felix was perfectly serious. His eyes burned with great intensity and I felt the force of a personality of high magnetism, which, though I could not understand it, was indicative, I felt sure, of the

loftiest musical genius. I was disturbed and excited and could hardly swallow the rest of my coffee.

As my mother did not come, Felix suggested that we should walk slowly back to the shop. He paid for my coffee and we went out into the street. The traffic held us up for a moment and I heard him say--to my astonishment:

I want to hear you sing. Your mother hopes you may have your father's gift.

At that moment a pause in the stream of vehicles allowed us to cross over and we arrived at the iron staircase before I had recovered sufficiently to reply.

By Jove, I know what we'll do, he cried in excitement. Max used to have a piano in the back of his shop. If it's still there you shall sing to me.

I can't sing, I faltered.

Nonsense. It's to be your career. Your mother told me all about it. Don't pretend to be modest. No artist can afford to be modest. Come, let's go up.

Stunned, I followed him up the iron staircase and in a moment we were in the shop. Tall bookcases stacked with music allowed only single-file entry. Piles of volumes on the floor impeded us and the dust lay thick on shelf and book. I rested my hand for a moment on a bookcase as I squeezed by, and my glove was blackened with dirt. A man with a glass eye emerged from a recess.

Where's Madame Reinhart? demanded Felix.

Still with Mr. Heppenstall, said the wall-eyed man. Did you want something?

I want a piano, said Felix. Has old Max still got one?

Still here, yes, said the man. But I'll have to ask . . .

No, you won't. He'll let me use it. I'm an old friend. And this is Miss Reinhart, daughter of Marcus Reinhart. Hofenstahl can hardly deny her the use of the piano.

The man looked suitably impressed by my name.

What are you going to do? I whispered.

You're going to sing to me, my little Lise. I have told you.

No, please, I would rather not.

But Felix took no notice of my demurs. And, half-fascinated, half-fearful, I followed him into the back of the premises.

It seems a suitable point at which to say something of the physical gift which I had, I suppose, inherited from my father—my voice. I had inherited, too, his physique, rather stocky and deep-chested, and when I was about twelve my voice began to develop and it soon became apparent to me that it was stronger than those of my piping schoolfellows, and of an entirely different quality. At school, singing was confined to one weekly class in which I sang, with zest, songs such as Coleridge-Taylor's *Mother loves violets*, and, for a contrast (our two class songs were always wisely contrasted in this manner), *Clang, clang, clang on the anvil*. The singing was apathetic. I was one of the few children who really enjoyed it and it was the exercise rather than the songs which I enjoyed. I was continually being told to modulate my voice. Lise, the singing mistress would cry, and clap her feeble, wet hands, Lise, your voice stands out too much. Blend, my dear, blend. It never occurred to me to ask to sing by myself. I did not carol about the house, and the Yeos, who were an unmusical family, had no idea that I could sing a note. I knew nothing about music and was taught nothing. I regarded the singing lessons as a branch of my physical activities and exercised my voice there as I exercised my limbs at netball and hockey. I certainly listened to music very little. An occasional record was played at school, in a class ineptly named Musical Appreciation, when our mistress drew unintelligible symbols on the blackboard and talked of cadences and triads, mysteries which I never penetrated and which had no attraction for me.

For four years I had attended this school where my name meant little, where music was at a discount, and where my secret but shallow-rooted desire to sing by myself had been quietly and persistently frustrated. To sing alone would have been considered bad for my character and I went to school in a period when character-forming was the vogue,

with the result that I had no character of my own at all worth speaking of when I completed my education, and was as immature as a child of ten would be today. My desire, too, was one which sprang from a vague idea of being a singer, rather than from any very imperative inner compulsion to express my personality vocally, and it would have been, paradoxically, an agony to me to have had to overcome my shyness and stand alone on a platform. I had never been prompted (as I think I would have been, had I had the singer's true instincts) to offend the propriety in which I was set like a fly in amber, by insisting that my voice should be heard. Now the opportunity had come at last, and I was afraid.

I found myself being led, almost pulled, into a tiny, dirty little room at the end of a narrow passage overlooking the yard. It contained nothing but an antique piano with rusty candle sconces, a stool and a quantity of ragged music. It clearly had not been cleaned for years and it was almost impossible to see out of the window.

Felix wrote his name on the yellow film of the pane. One day, he remarked, Hofenstahl will be proud to have it there and glad that he never wasted his money on window cleaners. Now, what shall we sing?

He was holding my hand as though I were a small child, and coaxing me. His hand was hard and smooth like a hollow stone, and I liked the feel of it.

Come along, he coaxed. I know you've never had lessons. It doesn't matter. Just let's hear your voice. What did they teach you at school? *The Lass of Richmond Hill*?

Yes, I said. I do know that, but I've forgotten the words.

*Blow, blow thou winter wind? Nymphs and shepherds?*

No, I don't know those. (A faint glimmering of taste kept me from mentioning *Mother loves violets* or *Clang, clang, clang!*)

As he was speaking, he played a few bars on the execrable piano. He grimaced.

Like sweet bells jangled out of tune, he remarked.

It was my first experience of quotation, that potent accessory of intimate conversation.

Oh, do you read Shakespeare? I cried naïvely. It had not occurred to me that a man would read Shakespeare. My education had led me to believe that he was a school text-book and a quarry for dramatic scenes on Foundation Day. Felix looked at me with that peculiar intentness I had noticed before, a look which caught one up into close proximity with his mood, a kind of impalpable embrace.

We must read some Shakespeare, he said. We could read it in the evenings.

Oh, yes! I replied with pleasure.

I record this conversation here, not because it was in any way remarkable or interesting. It was as commonplace as it could be. It was my reaction to it which now I remember with a certain astonishment. His words carried for me no overtones, no harmonics, as it were, from which I might have recognised the drift of my own feelings. Shakespeare, at whose beauties I had but dimly guessed in the class-room, suddenly became of value to me, and secretly I read all the plays through, in the early months of my London life. But I never actually read any with Felix. He seemed to have forgotten his suggestion and I never dared to remind him of it.

The room was small and cold with the kind of dry, stuffy cold that produces a damp perspiration. The air was exhausted and lifeless and Felix's vitality pulsed like a drum against the narrow walls. I felt intensely aware of his physical proximity, as I had never felt aware of Edward's. There seemed hardly enough air in the room for both of us and I found myself breathing quickly. I noticed a dozen things about him which I had never noticed about any other person. After years at Folliotts I doubt if I could, at that moment, have told anyone the colour of Edward's eyes, or how Mr. Yeo—Uncle Tim—parted his hair. Yet now, in only a few seconds, as he played snatches from songs at the piano, I noticed how ashen and silky was Felix's hair, as soft

as a child's; the absence of bristle or blueness on his cheek; the firm white skin where his neck disappeared into his collar. And I was as unaware of the inner direction which these observations took as I was about the excitement I felt at the prospect of reading Shakespeare with him. He took his hands off the keys for a moment and looked up at me.

Didn't they ever ask you to sing solos in your school chapel, or at concerts? he asked.

Oh, no. I replied. We were all treated alike. We never had solos. Miss Springer hated anyone to be pushed forward, or singled out.

Dear me, he said. What a very inartistic education you have had, my little Lise.

I don't think the girls had ever heard of my father, I went on, nor most of the mistresses either.

What barbarians! Was there no music mistress?

Oh yes, and she had one or two records of my father's, but she had never been to Covent Garden, and I don't think she liked opera. They weren't operatic records.

Wait a moment, Lise, I can tell you what they were.

He was gazing up into my face, and between us there lay that thrilling intimacy of the shared joke.

One was the *Volga Boatmen*.

Oh, it was, it was, I cried, delightedly. How clever of you! She used to play it sometimes and the girls used to look incredulously at me when she told them it was my father singing. I don't think they believed her. They thought I had stuffed her up with some tale.

He turned back abruptly to the piano. I realise now that he was not interested in my past but in my future.

A song? he said.

I remembered *Sally in our alley* and suggested it.

He played a chord and somewhat tentatively I began to sing. I managed the big intervals extremely badly. It was strange to hear my own voice, so breathy and uncontrolled and so very big in the tiny room. After the first few bars I

instinctively reduced the volume, until by the end I was almost whispering.

He swivelled round on the stool and to my consternation pressed his hand against my stomach.

Keep that in, my good girl, he said peremptorily, and breathe down on to it. Open your mouth.

I found his finger at my mouth and backed away from him.

Wider, wider, he commanded. Now, let it go. With one hand he improvised an accompaniment and with the other he thrust against my lower ribs, as I sang.

Breathe deeper and not so often, he bellowed above the sound of my voice. Hypnotised, I sang at full volume, raw and untrained, and I felt suddenly an enormous confidence as I heard myself swelling out on the top notes. The voice, almost as if it did not belong to me, echoed in my ears. I heard it and I was amazed. I did not know that my own voice sounded like this. The illusionary sense of tremendous vocal power (I did not realise how bad the actual production was) and the interest taken in me by this young man combined to turn my head. My mother came into the room followed by Mr. Hofenstahl and before she could speak I had flung myself upon her and cried:

Mother, am I going to be a singer?

How unbelievable it sounds now. I cannot conceive of children today saying this to their mothers, nor, if they did, can I imagine that their mothers' response and subsequent action would be what my mother's was. It is easy to lay stress upon the peculiar circumstances—my lack of a father, the distortion of my voice in that small dry cell of a room, the presence of Felix and the unrecognised emotional excitement which was caused in my breast, but something more permanent than circumstance moulded the incident and what followed it. I was by nature immature. I had not grown up at Folliotts and this surely was due to something deficient in me, for others grew up and matured around me. Being as I was, I was bound to succumb to another's personality as soon as I met one who wanted to dominate

me. At Folliotts no one had wished to impose on me. Now they did, and I was ready for it, like a handful of wet clay.

At my remark, my mother looked over my head towards Felix. I have persuaded her to sing, he said.

So I heard, said my mother. We heard it, Max and I, and had to come.

She dabbed her eyes with a handkerchief. You know it sounds silly, she said, but the voice has a—a quality that reminds me of her father's.

It is not yet a voice, said Max Hofenstahl curtly. It is merely an instrument. She does not know how to use it. Like an amateur blowing a trumpet, no?

Of course, cried my mother, smiling tenderly at my bewildered face. Of course, she is untrained, untaught. But, Max, you heard the voice. It was my dream. All these years in Germany I have told myself, if my Lise has her father's voice, if only, if only—and I have not dared to say anything to her about it yet.

She looked at Felix with a sudden lowering of her brows. She was not altogether pleased with him.

You took a risk, Felix, she said rather coldly.

He shrugged his shoulders.

It had to be taken sometime, he retorted lightly. I have made her sing better than you would have done. You embarrass her, Stella.

There was a moment's silence in the stuffy little room. Palpitating against its walls was some current of emotion I could feel but not define. I pushed my way past the old music-seller into the narrow passage. My mother followed me.

Mr. Hofenstahl and I have finished our talk, she said. Are you coming, Felix, or do you want to buy some music?

No, said Felix shortly, I have no money.

The man with a glass eye uttered a sudden grotesque bellow of laughter and Hofenstahl turned round on him in a fury.

Ach, Gott! he shouted. That I have to put up with your

impertinence, is it not enough—but you must insult my friends——

He seized my mother's arm and hurried her to the top of the iron staircase.

He is my sister's son—my dead sister's son. I must look after him. You must excuse, please, Madame Reinhart.

But, of course! cried my mother.

He laughs sometimes, the old man went on. He laughs at—oh, at nothing, at a cat crossing the yard, a fly on the window-pane.

Don't apologise, Herr Hofenstahl, don't apologise. He meant nothing, I'm sure.

You are good, Madame Reinhart. I am proud to have been of help. It is wonderful to have you back in London. Ah, now, if only the master were here. If only he were here!

My mother tapped him lightly on the cheek with her forefinger.

Times have changed, she said. Times have changed—like your name, Mr. Heppenstall.

She pointed to the signboard. He bowed his farewells, and we went down into the yard in single file. As we crossed and made our way through the alley—with myself trailing behind the other two—my mother said to Felix:

That wall-eyed son of his ought to be locked up.

Son? said Felix.

Oh, my dear, of course he's Hofenstahl's son. A natural son. People don't carry their generosity that far towards their nephews.

Felix looked at my mother admiringly.

You should write a novel, Stella, he said. You always see through people's subterfuges.

My mother shrugged her shoulders.

I know the type, she said indifferently.

The type? Are we all types, then?

She put her hand on his arm.

All but the very few, she answered.

Felix lifted her hand quickly to his lips and said some-

thing which I could not catch. They had forgotten me and I felt impelled to show an interest in the afternoon's business.

Did Herr Hofenstahl lend you some money? I said in rather a shrill voice.

Felix turned and looked down on me.

Lise! he cried. How right you are. We are forgetting the most important thing of all. Take my arm.

He proffered me his free arm and, looking from one to the other of us, he said:

Has Herr Hofenstahl been helpful, Stella?

He hasn't failed me, she replied.

We went to an expensive restaurant, and at the end of a meal such as I had never had before, my mother passed Felix something underneath the table and he paid the bill in a high good humour.

Within a month we were installed in a house in Bellingham Square and I had started singing lessons with an aged and celebrated teacher, Herr Pekker. The top of our house was made into a flat for Felix, with a studio for his piano. A new life had begun. So completely different was it in every particular from the war years I had spent at Folliott's that I soon viewed those as an unfortunate interruption in my life as a musician, which seemed to me to stretch from my earliest years in Pimlico houses, full of the sound of singing and voices speaking in foreign languages, to this post-war London in which I found myself. My memory of the life I had actually lived before the war, alternating between the quiet country house at Lodmouth and the cosmopolitan artist community round my parents in London, became cloudy and distorted. The memories of childhood are only accurate in so far as they concern the secret act, the private sorrow and joy. In general, they are overlaid by a thick veneer of later reference back by grown-ups, who, remembering for us, trace over the wax of our memory like a palimpsest their own adult impressions, so that we remember their remembering rather than our own. My mother, who had an inventive mind, was sure that I had shown signs of being a

singer before I was seven. She recalled remarks made by this, that and the other person. She quoted ambitious prognostications and extraordinary hopes upon the part of my father regarding my future career which I am now certain he never entertained. Moreover, so imbued with ambition was I myself that I aided and abetted my mother's memory. Do you remember so-and-so? I would ask. And off she would go into reminiscences which were at least partly prompted by my suggestion. There was in me something struggling for outlet, but it was not the temperament of an artist. The need to fulfil oneself is peculiarly strong in those to whom fulfilment does not come naturally, imperceptibly, like the growth of the body. I had awoken at the age of seventeen to find myself and know myself unfledged, and when the first thing suggested to me was that I should become a singer, the childish ambition which still lived in my green personality, together with the unfortunate gift of a vocal instrument at least powerful if nothing else, made me ready enough to seize upon this career as my own. My artistic temperament, what there was of it, was a small outcrop upon the crust of my personality. Perhaps it was as well that it manifested itself, and was weathered away by circumstances fairly quickly.

My mother was born to be the wife of a great man. In my father she found one whose generosity and real large-heartedness enfolded her and, like a cloak, concealed from others her deficiencies. Her natural capacities were not mean. She was charming, and though she had little taste, she reflected like a mirror the opinions and enthusiasms of others, which made her popular among those who only wished to have their own foibles reinforced. She was also a competent business woman and my father would have been bound to her by ties of gratitude if nothing else, for she managed his affairs expertly. His death deprived her of more than a husband. It deprived her of the opportunity for the necessary exercise of her proper gifts. She was, in those first few months after his death, trapped by a morbid inertia

more deadly than any suffering caused by her four years' internment. In such a state of mind, and, without knowing it, already in search of a substitute for my father, she turned to Felix and to her daughter, both potential exploitees from whom she would in time choose the more rewarding of the two. She sprang to life, first for Felix and then for me. She organised, she planned, she interviewed. She spent hours in Felix's flat, listening to his new compositions.

He has the genuine spark, she told me on one occasion, when she came down the stairs, her eyes shining.

Lise, one day you will be proud to think your mother fostered such a genius.

I seldom heard these works and was too ignorant to judge those I heard. I thought them wonderful and said so. I was a little awe-struck, when I thought about it, to realise that a second Schubert or Mozart was living in the same house with me. But Felix did not very often join us. When he did, he questioned me about my singing, or listened, more often, to my mother's account of my progress, and sometimes they discussed money matters in withdrawn tones, sitting together at a small table. On more than one occasion he came and sulked in our room, and swore he would never write another note. Then my mother would make him play Bezique with her, and by the end of the evening he was as cheerful as a schoolboy. On one such occasion he caught my mother by the waist and danced a mad waltz with her all round the drawing-room. The lamp was knocked over and the room plunged into darkness. When we succeeded in getting some light again, my mother and Felix looked at me, and both burst out laughing. I felt uncomfortable, as I used to feel as a child when I intruded on a private game among my school-fellows. I went to bed that night very unhappy, and cried as I thought of Edward and how happy we had been in the Lodmouth days.

But in general the time passed very quickly for me, and I was absorbed in the business of learning to sing. I found it much harder than I had imagined. Herr Bekker was a cynical old man.

Your mother's money is goot, he would murmur, with his eyes upcast, as I finished an exercise.

I did not comprehend this attitude in the least. It was therefore a surprise to me when my mother told me that I was no longer to learn from him because he was teaching me nothing. I had grown fond of the old man in a way, and thought I had made immense progress with him. My mother seemed put out about the whole matter, and declared that she had been much deceived—she hated to think herself deceived. She announced that she had found a better teacher, a woman, Lili Rosenberg. In the manner of most singing teachers, as I was to discover, Lili Rosenberg declared that I had been taught by entirely the wrong method, and began again at the beginning. She was a disagreeable woman. Her breath smelt abominably and her room was always untidy and her appearance unkempt. She was usually very deferential to my mother, and seemed over-anxious to please her, but when I was alone with her, she would sometimes lose her temper, scream at me and abuse me. Yet, before I went, she always begged my forgiveness, sometimes with maudlin tears which embarrassed me horribly. Once she even kissed me after one of these scenes, and implored me not to tell my mother of what had happened. But at last she threw her humility to the winds, and refused even to begin her lesson with me. When I arrived, she asked me avidly whether I had brought her anything from Madame Reinhart. When I answered no, she folded her skinny arms and announced that she would not teach me, not she. Where was the money for my last set of lessons? Without the money she would not have me in her room. I was a little frightened, for under my arrogance and assurance was still the core of timidity which was my true being. I tried to persuade her to let me in. Of course my mother would pay her, I protested, adding with bravado that my mother had plenty of money.

Plenty of money! Fräulein Rosenberg laughed derisively.

But vere is it now? Answer me that! In the pockets of that young man she keeps.

I blushed angrily and the old woman laughed the more. Wiping her eyes with a filthy handkerchief, she leaned up against her front door and informed me that I had no musical talent and I would never have any, that I would be a laughing-stock the moment I stepped upon a platform, that only the necessity of having bread to fill her belly had induced her to take me as a pupil. (Like all Germans she had had a hard time during the war and was almost without connections when she started teaching me in 1919). She went on to say that my mother's name was worth a great deal to her but even that could not compensate her for the torture of having to teach a young woman who, she averred, roared like the bull of Bashan and could not understand the simplest principles of production, and now if the money were not forthcoming, then, poof! she would no longer extend to me the benefits of her teaching.

I almost ran home. My pride was excessively wounded and my whole being jarred and confused so that I hardly knew what to think. I hurried into the house at Bellingham Square but my mother was out, thinking me at my lesson. Upstairs I could hear the sour. of a piano and I ran up to the flat at the top, with tears now streaming down my face.

Although I did, of course, see a certain amount of Felix, I had had little private conversation with him, and I had never been up to his rooms. Both of us were working extremely hard in those early months, driven on, like horses in double harness, by my mother's organising passion and her barely concealed impatience for results.

Six months in the company of my mother, Felix and their friends had made me as facile in the display of emotions as they were. The reticence of Edward and his family, to which I had subscribed readily enough in my teens when my true nature had been unveneered, now seemed to me ridiculous. I had learned that what was felt should immediately be expressed. It was part of temperament. I had little to

express, so shallow were my feelings and so limited my experience. Like those whom I saw around me, however, I quickly practised to exaggerate petty grievances or imagined sorrows, and fabricated slights. I took sides in quarrels between singers with a passionate partisanship which had no basis of critical judgment, and I magnified every passing fancy or dislike into a thing of moment. Our house was in a ferment of jealousies and passions which had little validity. The singers and musicians who came to my mother and poured out their hopes and their bitternesses created in the house a constant stirring up of shallow waters and in the muddy foam of emotional turbulence it was difficult for me to distinguish what was genuine from what was affected or spurious.

Arrived back from Fräulein Rosenberg's with every nerve of my frame severely jarred, and finding no mother upon whom to pour out my frightened fury, I stumbled up the stairs towards the sound of the piano. Arrived at the door, I paused for a moment and perhaps a gleam of reason illumined my mind, and made me hesitate to lay before someone else the source of my humiliation. Then the memory of Lili Rosenberg's laughter whipped my raw feelings and the hot tears poured down my face afresh. I was overwhelmed with a deep sense of injury which could only find relief in confession and I pushed open the door without even knocking. Felix was sitting at his piano, a gift from my mother. On the music-rest was a piece of manuscript paper covered with hieroglyphics. He turned round as he heard me enter and jumped to his feet.

My poor little Lise! he cried. Whatever is the matter?

I flung myself upon him, hungry for comfort, and sobbed out a confused tale in which the chief ingredient was my own wounded pride. Over and over again, with the maddening reiteration of the *woebegone*, I repeated; I could understand she was upset about not getting the money, but to make that an excuse for an attack on me, on my voice . . . oh, Felix, she said such awful things!

Felix listened to my tirade, dried my eyes with his own silk handkerchief and stroked my hair. At last I had no more to say and no more tears to weep. We were both silent. I looked round the room. It was very comfortable and furnished with a degree of taste and expense that was not found downstairs in our own rooms. It was a large room which occupied the entire front of the house on that storey. The smaller room behind was separated from it not by a door but by an open arch and looking through I could see Felix's bed, which was covered with a heavy silk counterpane of deep magenta. Now that my shallow spring of misery was spent there seemed nothing to say.

I got up and walked over to the window. Below me lay the street.

How dingy it is here, I said sulkily, I wonder you can compose in such surroundings.

I never look out of the window, said Felix. I glanced back into the room. It certainly presented a complete contrast. The carpet was thick and luxurious, the window curtains against which I was leaning brushed my cheek with a delicate touch and I knew them to be of velvet. There was an air of opulence about the room which surprised me. Felix stared at my face.

What are you thinking? he asked.

It—it all looks so expensive, I burst out naïvely.

It is expensive, he replied solemnly. And why not?

I did not quite know why not. It occurred to me dimly that my mother must have paid for it, but then, if she wanted to, why should she not? Felix was her protégé.

He sat down on a chair, his legs astride the seat, his arms resting on the back, his eyes searching my face with that characteristic, piercing look. I had seen it now on several occasions and always it appeared when something—an incident or a remark—touched him very closely. He cast out this beam as though to dazzle the eyes of the onlookers, rather than to light up what he himself was looking at.

In Germany, during those terrible years, I was frozen into

inertia, he said. I composed nothing. Now, in the warmth of your mother's (he hesitated) generosity, I feel myself expanding, flowering, luxuriating.

What are you composing? I asked.

Songs, he replied briefly.

When I—when I am ready to sing in public, I will sing your songs, I said, blushing violently.

He turned away from me, and I could not see his expression.

I don't know how long it will be though, I went on lamely.

He turned and studied me.

It will be years, he said briefly.

Years?

My dear girl, you have only been studying for six months.

I felt that he had suddenly been transformed into quite a different person, and I was frightened of his careless, superior manner.

I—I didn't realise it would be so long, I said.

What do you really know about singing, or music? he asked.

I suppose I know very little.

Is it too late for you to go back to your friends?

Felix, I can't. I—want to sing.

A softer look came into his face, and something almost like pity.

You mustn't take any notice of me, he said. There is something I want to say to you, while I can still say it. I think you have a voice, but do you ever ask yourself what more is needed?

What more is needed? I echoed.

Yes. The singer's temperament. The unscrupulous, immoral, pushing, grasping, heartless ambition of an artist. Have you that?

But, I protested, more hurt than comprehending, you have hardly heard me.

Ah, I don't need to hear you, only to know you.

I don't think you *do* know me.

I do, he retorted, better than you think.

My mother evidently thinks it worth while to spend a small fortune on my training, anyway, I said angrily.

Your mother! he laughed abruptly. Ah, yes, your mother.

He looked round his expensive room, and went on, For you an expensive training, for me an expensive carpet, but, my little Lise, we shall have to bring her some return. Have you thought of that—and it will be harder for you than for me.

I could not understand this.

Return? I said indignantly. My mother doesn't need money.

Not money, he said patiently, but fame. She needs that. Suppose you don't achieve it? Lise, get out while the going is good.

If you think that's all my mother wants, why don't you get out? I answered.

Ah, but I don't particularly want to.

He walked up and down the room once or twice.

How difficult it is, he said at last, for us to understand each other. We speak a different language.

But why do we have to? I pleaded. I want to understand you. I—I would like to know you better.

Downstairs the front door slammed.

That will be your mother, he said. You had better go down.

Oh no, I cried, let me stay. She can come up here. I'll call down over the banisters and then you can help me tell her about Fräulein Rosenberg. She might be angry.

Felix gripped my wrist and pushed me towards the door.

No, he said, callously. I won't be brought in on this. It has nothing to do with me. Do you understand?

He let me go and walked quickly over to the piano, where he began to play very noisily and unmusically. When I did not move, he broke off with an exasperated gesture and turned towards me. I thought he was going to strike me, so flushed and angry was his face, and I made an appealing

gesture, something spontaneous which sprang from a deeper layer of feelings than those facile reactions which had lately moved me. Felix's face changed like a winter pool when a gleam of sunshine passes over it. He held out his hand, and I took it, and gripped it tightly.

Ah, Lise, he said. I am the wrong person to appeal to like this. It will not make me help you. I can't be your mentor. I can't be to you—a friend. Such things aren't possible.

But I was obsessed. Words were no more to me than an incantation in a long-forgotten language. I was incapable of dissecting their meaning. It was enough to hear Felix's voice. As though he were Apollo prophesying, I worshipped the voice, and interpreted the words, as those of old interpreted the cryptic answers that boomed from the sacred cave, simply as a confirmation of my own desires. I loved Felix. That he took my hand and spoke to me could only mean that he loved me. Enriched with this erroneous belief, I hurried downstairs. As I went I found I still had on my outdoor coat though my hat was in the hall. I saw that my mother was reading a letter. She turned vaguely towards me.

You're back soon, she said. Why aren't you practising?

Mother, Fräulein Rosenberg won't have me back as a pupil. Not unless you pay her.

What insolence! replied my mother, with casual indifference. The miserable creature! Let her live on her reputation, then, though I hardly think it will line her stomach to her satisfaction.

The day was heavy, and I was besides very warm from my talk with Felix and my hurried run downstairs. Yet what my mother said made me feel cold suddenly. I knew, of course, that she was hard. Despite her public protestations of affection for me, she gave me, in fact, no real evidence of love, but as I hardly expected it, it did not make me unhappy. She had supplied me with food for my pride, and given me an object to live for, which lessened my actual need of her; she supplied my material wants and gave me a ready-made environment, which I thought proper to my artistic career.

Only, in the vacuum created by her lack of moral direction, there remained some vestigial traces of the principles and beliefs I had imbibed at Folliotts. I remembered what I had only noticed with contempt before—Fräulein Rosenberg's threadbare black dresses, the hole in the carpet just by the piano where so many pupils had stood in past days, and the little newspaper parcel of evil-smelling fish which she invariably left on the mantelpiece. I raised my voice, rather feebly, it is true, but I did raise it in Fräulein Rosenberg's defence.

Ought she not to have the money? I said.

My dear Lise (my mother looked up with exasperation from the letter she was holding), do leave the management of your training to me. I have some difficulties at the moment, but they are only temporary. It has cost me a lot of money setting up this house. (I thought of Felix's carpet and piano and magenta bed-cover).

Still I persisted.

I think she is terribly poor.

Don't pity her, said my mother calmly. It is a mistake to pity people. Be generous—your father was generous to a fault—artists usually are. But be generous only with your hands, not with your heart.

I—I don't understand.

My dear, people will expect you to be generous—or to be miserly—at least to be something definite, and it is better, of course, to be generous—up to a point. But if you want to get on, you really must not expend your emotional powers on being sorry for every lame dog you meet. You will meet so many in the musical world. Hand them a shilling and pass on quickly. Don't stay to be sorry for them.

I suppose I stared at this piece of advice, for she turned on me and shook me by the shoulders.

Oh, Lise, Lise, sometimes I despair of you. You have your father's soft streak. You are so gauche, so—so *backfisch*! Run into the studio and practise, my dear child. I must telephone. I must find you another teacher.

Slowly I walked out of the room and downstairs to the

empty music-room. I was faced for the second time that morning by harsh reality. I suppose this was the first time in this six months that I consciously considered my position, and in particular my position *vis-à-vis* my mother, and considered it with any honesty. It seems therefore an appropriate place in the narrative to give some account of my mother, as she began, dimly, to take shape in my mind at that time. You must imagine me alone in the music-room in Bellingham Square, a sunless room at the back of the house, looking out on the blank walls of a yard. I did not practise. I did not touch the piano. Instead, I went to the window and opened it. I sat on the sill and looked over the low wall of the yard to the two-storey coach-houses and stabling running parallel with the houses, and forming Bellingham Mews. In the nineteen-twenties it was just becoming fashionable to live in a mews, and several of the empty coach-houses had been converted. One, nearly opposite to our own, sported bright blue check curtains and in it lived a clarinet player whose piercing instrument could be heard far into the night. This delighted my mother, who claimed that Bellingham Square and its environs were becoming quite an artists' quarter. The clarinet player was practising now.

There was a curious ambivalence about my mother. No one ever championed the bohemian life more ardently and no one was less typical of it. She did not, in truth, really understand what it was, any more than she understood the music which she heard so often and so splendidly performed. She had no artistic ability herself, and therefore no active part to play in the environment which she considered it necessary to create for my father, and later for myself and Felix. She was essentially unbohemian, a woman who liked luxury, who had no natural taste whatever, and loathed disorderliness. She would have been absolutely at home in the opulent, tasteless ménage of a stockbroker or company director of small education and great wealth. She could have organised into eminence a surgeon, or a lawyer, or even a judge, and the environment they required would have suited

her far better than the one she considered necessary for a singer. But having married an artist—and I think it was for love that they married—she had, according to her lights, given him the life she felt he needed and best fitted him. He would have been a great singer without her. He might not have been so famed and successful an artist.

When my mother returned to London, Felix was the protégé on whom she lavished the gifts she had used in my father's service. But she had never been certain of Felix. A composer is less calculable than a singer. I was a kind of insurance—in more ways than one, though I did not realise this at the time. What did I feel for my mother? It is difficult to say, so confused in my mind was I. She embarrassed me not a little, especially when she adopted that artificial manner which she had used on the day of her arrival and which reappeared on occasion, to my acute discomfort. This artificiality was only manifest when other people were present. My mother's natural manner towards me was brisk and businesslike, and sprang from the inner regard she had for me as an investment rather than a daughter. But my mother liked to do what she conceived to be the right thing, and as it was proper for mothers to express an outward affection for their daughters, she adopted a manner of intolerable artificiality at times, which discomforted me and I am sure deceived no one. However, it was fortunate that she was not obliged to perform in this manner often, for when friends were present in number it was usually possible for us to go through the whole evening without speaking to each other.

In musical company, she was accustomed to efface herself in such a manner that, although she said little (indeed she had little to say), she remained the true centre of the party.

In musical gatherings it is those who perform rather than those who talk who make themselves heard. Yet, though the room might be dominated by the sound of voice or instrument, there would always be some who slipped away into the little ante-room off the drawing-room, to talk to my mother, or to boast, or to grouse. There were few in the

musical world whom she did not know, of the older generation at least.

As the months went by, the composition of the gatherings was to change considerably. Attracted by the famous names, the comparative luxury of my mother's way of living, and the incessant hope of landing an engagement, many lesser musicians, especially singers, found their way to my mother's drawing-room. These were to prove the most tenacious of our guests. Some of the famous, having paid their tribute to my father by calling upon his widow, did not come again, but there remained a few faithful old friends who continued to come, and shed around my mother the lustre in which she loved to shine and to which were drawn like moths the lesser creatures whom she loved to patronise, counsel and assist.

As for me, this life among musicians went to my head. Infected with my mother's ambitious designs for my career, I was beginning to take my place among the professional artists as though I were an established singer. My pride was the more hurt to hear her call me *backfisch*. I had imagined myself very much my father's daughter, and had even, rather tentatively and as yet unnoticed, adopted one or two of his mannerisms. And now to be told I had no temperament! Yet how true it was. My mother was as a rule far from percipient, but she had a flash of insight then—an insight which arose from her keen business instinct. To her, my temperament was not important except as a commercial asset. For personal qualities carrying no cash possibilities, my mother would have had no insight.

I have tried to present my mother as far as possible in the light in which I saw her at that time, omitting what was added from later knowledge and judgment, as well as what was later softened and obliterated. The events of that morning were of far-reaching influence over me. I had come back from Lili Rosenberg's shaken and frightened, and had my mother been there to receive me, however unsympathetically, I might have veered upon another course. When I ran blindly up the

stairs to Felix, it was almost as though I was running back to Folliotts. The two worlds of Lodmouth and London were at no point in contact, but some quality in Felix provided a tangent and along it I reached, for a moment, an illusion of the security I had known in Edward and his family. The loneliness which hard work and self-deception had disguised from me made its presence felt on that morning and drove me to Felix. It drove me further still. On the impetus of my flight from reality and Lili Rosenberg, I fell deeply in love.

As I sat in the window embrasure that morning, too disconsolate to practise, my reflections were bent at first not towards the delicious consideration of my feelings for Felix, but upon the humiliating opinions voiced by Lili Rosenberg and my mother. I assumed that I must at least *appear* as they said, but not for a moment did I admit to myself that I actually merited the disagreeable adjectives—*gauche . . . backfisch*. There was too much of Folliotts about me still, I told myself. I must eradicate those influences. I must study my models more carefully. I realised that I must have regarded Fräulein Rosenberg in quite the wrong light. She had reminded me of one of those poor old village women to whom Mrs. Yeo had been used to dispense an unassuming charity. But Fräulein Rosenberg, as far as I was concerned, was no more than a means to an end. She had something which I needed for my artistic progress and my mother had offered to buy it from her. She had used my mother's temporary lapse in payment as an opportunity to step outside her province and criticise me. She was paid to train my voice, not to utter opinions as to whether its quality merited training or not, any more than a butcher would have the right to quibble as to whether or not a customer had the gastronomic taste to enjoy the quails he was paying for. Fräulein Rosenberg could do without my mother's money if she preferred. She was not my responsibility. No one was my responsibility. I was the responsibility of other people, on the contrary, a being who was the vessel of a heavenly gift, and as such to be cosseted, nursed and led by the hand

up the lower slopes of that Parnassian mount whose heights I had no doubt of ultimately reaching. No doubts? No, at this time, I really had no doubts, but this memorable day was the first one on which there appeared a crack in the façade. I did perceive that there might in fact be something wrong with me, even though I did not know in the least what it was.

I was a negative, receiving without comment, with the flat fidelity of a photograph, the scenes and personalities about me. No one had as yet demanded of me the positive projection of my own personality upon others which is a necessary requirement of the artist. I had, I suppose, no personality to project. Temperament, that indefinable quality, so much talked of in our circle, I conceived of in its most facile aspect—as a waywardness, an affectation, a surface instability, a tendency to uncontrolled rages, to any form of unreasonableness or even hysteria which an artist liked to display. I thought of it as the outward expression of an inner artistic attitude to life, consisting in a contempt for convention and a belief that what the emotions dictated must be right.

My mother did not manifest the characteristics of an artist, but I did not expect her to. She was to my eyes, as she was to others, the supreme patroness. Even so, she had her own mannerisms and unconventionalities. She was a striking-looking woman, with a pale, high-cheeked face and dark hair, worn parted in the middle and coiled at the nape of the neck, a style not uncommon nowadays, but rare in those days of bobs and shingles. In her clothes she was distinctive too, and cultivated a rather foreign, Russian look. She liked to wear the heavily-embroidered peasant blouses she had bought abroad before the war, and still possessed, for they had been left in a trunk at a friend's house in London in 1914. When she went out she wore a cloak and her fine carriage and height enabled her to wear this with grace which won her stares of admiration in the streets. Her character to me had also an essential rightness. I could not question it. It certainly was not moral rectitude, but I was too young to

judge her on this score in any case. Had she been openly amoral, had she uttered principles which contravened the elementary moral laws that even the most untaught of us recognise, I should have been offended. But she never discussed such matters and want of principle is harder to discern than bad principle, so that it took me some time to comprehend the moral character of my mother. What was easily discernible by me was what I can only describe as her command of life. She imposed herself on her environment, she formed it, moulded it to suit her and appeared to me to have a devastating perfection which I could never achieve. Her attitude was that what you did not like about life you altered. She refused to accept what was not to her taste, and as she was ruthless over the feelings of others and as she possessed that Open Sesame, a good income, she was able to create and govern her small community in a manner someone more sensitive could never have done. Yet she had a considerable amount of tact and we none of us knew the extent to which we were being organised. Thus I myself genuinely believed that I was destined to be a singer and never perceived that my mother's intense interest in my career was merely devoted to her own purposes. Nor did I know the weakness that lay beneath the perfect and assured exterior, a weakness of judgment and penetration, which while it allowed her to ride roughshod over opposition prevented her from seeing how far she herself was being used by spirits as unscrupulous as herself. In fact, my mother was the last person in whom one would have suspected weakness of any kind. Without noisily asserting herself and without exerting an overt and intolerable tyranny over those around her she nevertheless seemed always and inevitably right. She was never at a loss. She never asked advice. A retentive memory gave her a command over the smallest details. Never did she have to enquire where such-and-such a thing could be bought or such-and-such a person could be found. Her world was circumscribed within fairly narrow limits, but within those confines there was none so

omniscient and infallible. It was no wonder that we who were closest to her allowed her to direct our lives. She could do it so much better than we could ourselves. Her very lack of artistic temperament, her position as it were above bohemianism, gave her authority.

I knew that my mother would send me to another singing teacher. I was quite passive about it. My ambition induced me to work hard but it did not lead me to make my own enquiries or form my own opinions. We rarely went to concerts though tickets were often sent us. Secretly I wanted to go, but my mother was inexorable. No, Lise, she would say. If you listen to so-and-so you will be infected with her mannerisms, or to so-and-so and you will pick up that fearful *tremolo*. Oh, no, my dear Lise, I cannot sit through the *Dichterliebe*, I find them unutterably boring. Sometimes I doubted whether my mother cared very much for music.

I wondered whom she would select for my next teacher, as I sat alone, ostensibly practising. I wondered also about Felix. When visitors came to the house and stayed, perhaps for a meal or a drink, almost invariably Felix would appear. My mother always welcomed him as another visitor. Indeed, he was often in his outdoor clothes. I was told to offer him a drink, perhaps, or if it was just before a meal my mother would press him to join us. I sometimes wondered whether our visitors always realised that he lived in the house with us. On these occasions Felix always addressed my mother with greatest respect, yet I noticed that when we were alone he sometimes displayed a faintly domineering, or even exasperated, manner towards her which puzzled me, and rather distressed me also. I turned over in my mind the brief time I had spent with him in his room that morning, and the air of secrecy which had surrounded us gave me a pleasurable excitement.

I had stepped out at last from the sheltered shore of my environment. I was on the brink of new discovery. Used as I was to Edward and the Yeos, my relationship with them, I

felt sure, could offer no new development. It was fixed for ever in the semi-parental affection which had nourished me when I needed it most. As for my mother, she did not induce in me any feeling sufficiently fervent to melt the rigour of my patterned behaviour towards her. Almost consciously, I recognised our relationship as a business one. But with Felix there was a new world to be explored.

He did not refer to my visit to his room in front of my mother, but one evening when she was out of the room fetching a book, he suddenly yawned, and said lazily:

When are you going to visit me again, Lise?

I don't know, I stammered.

I shall have to come and fetch you, he said.

After this brief encounter, my mother returned and he at once engaged her in conversation. From then on, I sought anxiously for some opportunity to go up to Felix's room. Though he had not said so, I sensed that I should not be welcome if my mother knew about it. Nothing suited me better. Clandestine was a word I had met with often enough in my rather slender acquaintance with light novels, and I could hardly conceive of a love that could flourish otherwise than in secret. On the very first occasion, therefore, that my mother was safely out of the house, I went up the stairs to Felix's rooms. I found my anticipated pleasure and excitement lessen with every step that I took. I was half afraid to go up to his door and knock, and at last, after standing for a minute or two outside it, I turned rather miserably to go. What could a being like Felix want with me? I asked myself bitterly. I could not translate my dream into reality. It seemed childish and ineffectual to me now. If he had really meant me to come, he would have come downstairs and fetched me, as he had said.

As I trod on the top stair, about to descend again, it creaked loudly, and I heard Felix walk across his room to the door. Panic-stricken, I bounded down the narrow stairs and had almost reached the bottom of the flight, when I heard his voice.

Why, Lise—it's you!

I looked up into his face, peering at me over the banisters. It looked rather amused.

Why are you running away? he asked, raising his eyebrows into his hair.

Transfixed, like a rabbit, I could only stare up at him silently, wishing I had never been such a fool as to come. Obviously he only thought it amusing. Slowly he began to descend the stairs.

Now, really, Lise, this is too bad of you—to come up and then run away again. Am I an ogre that you fear to enter my den? You have disturbed me. I shall punish you for it.

He grabbed my arm suddenly, and I found myself being pulled up the stairs after him. Once in his room, he let me go and surveyed me quizzically. But he was no longer laughing and his expression was good-humoured and affectionate. I began to relax.

Now let's look at you, he said. First your hair. I told you you would look like a little *fräulein*, and you do, with your hair plaited round your head like that.

It's my mother, I said ruefully. She insists on it being done this way.

But I like it—I like it, he cried. I have a passion for everything German—like your mother. It's delightful.

Do you really think so? I asked suspiciously, still not quite sure that he was not making fun of me.

Indeed I do, he answered solemnly.

Flattered a little, I turned and looked in his wall mirror. I must confess that I now thought quite favourably of the style myself. He stood behind me.

How long is it? he asked.

My hair?

Your hair, my little Gretchen. Only it ought to be fair hair, of course. You are rather a dark *fräulein*.

Before I could stop him, he had pulled out several pins and brought my hair tumbling down my back.

You have your mother's hair, he said suddenly, and in rather a cool, barber-like tone. Very fine.

We surveyed each other in the glass. Myself, rather flushed—he smiling, enigmatical.

You had better put it up again. I'll help you.

Oh, you won't know how, I expostulated.

Yes, I am an adept at doing hair, he replied coolly, and without further words he plaited it and pinned it round my head.

Now, he said, and scrutinised me carefully. I do it better than you do yourself.

I was too overcome to say anything, but partly from nerves, partly because he seemed to be playing such an absurd game with me, I laughed.

Suddenly he turned abruptly away from me to the piano, and began to play, talking while his fingers moved lightly over the keys.

You are very young, aren't you? he said. I don't really know how to amuse the young.

You don't have to amuse me, I answered, hurt by his change of tone.

Why did you come up here? Were you bored? he asked.

To see you, I stammered. Just—to see you.

He stopped playing and looked at me.

Perhaps you thought I was bored?

I didn't think about it at all, I answered, wondering how I could extricate myself from a situation I could neither understand nor control. I added:

I'll go away if you like.

No, he said. I don't like. I *was* bored. Stay here a little longer and tell me if you are happy living with your mother downstairs, in that little world I—know so little about. What is it like, tell me?

I work very hard, I said.

What else do you do?

I don't know. I go out with Mother—shopping and so on.

I believe you are lonely.

I made no reply to this. I hardly knew myself well enough and the conversation had strayed so far away from what I had imagined it would be that I had lost my bearings.

The truth is, said Felix, that I get lonely myself sometimes. One cannot work all day, and one certainly cannot think. Days are long. D'you find them so?

I do sometimes, I admitted.

Then we'll make a pact, he said. Whenever you feel lonely, you are to remember that I am in the house, only a few feet above your head, and——

He did not complete the sentence.

May I come up again, then? I asked boldly.

He withdrew a little and stared very hard at me.

You must use your discretion about that, he said.

I felt a delicious sense of conspiratorial understanding with him.

All right, I said breathlessly. I will.

He looked at his watch.

You'd better go down, he said and led me by the hand to the top of the stairs. He watched me all the way down, but when I turned and looked back at him, I could not understand his expression.

It was a day or two after this curious and disturbing encounter, an encounter which moved me alternately to hope and despair, that my practising in the studio was interrupted by the sound of the front door bell. Obviously, it would be some teacher that my mother had telephoned. I stood, waiting to be summoned. I heard my mother's voice as she approached down the passage. Here she is, I heard her say. Here she is practising. Just listen for a moment. No? She's probably resting her voice for a minute or two.

I held up a manual of singing exercises and studied it carefully. I heard the door open.

Ah, there she is! cried my mother. Lise darling!

As though absorbed I lowered the book slowly and turned to the doorway. Beside my mother stood Edward Yeo. I started violently and the tattered, paper-covered book half

slipped out of my hand and hit the lower notes of the piano with a discordant boom. I blushed and could have wished myself a thousand miles away. How humiliating to be discovered in such silly play-acting by—of all people—Edward.

Lise! he said and held out his hand. He was looking at me with a slight smile as though he knew my predicament and wished to put me at my ease.

How well you look, I said formally.

I am, very well, he said. And you, Lise?

Oh, we mustn't stand talking here in this gloomy room, cried my mother. We'll go into the drawing-room and Germaine shall bring us some tea.

We sat down and my mother hurried off to see Germaine. Edward stared at me and then said bluntly:

Lise, I would hardly have recognised you. You've changed. Have I changed?

I don't think so. Except you look rather smart.

That's my London suit.

Perhaps it's the same with me. Just a matter of clothes.

No, more than that. When I came into the room, to see you standing there, so absorbed in music. The dazed look in your eyes, the way you refocused them on us—no, you seem a different person. You never looked like that over anything when you lived with us.

So I had deceived him. I might have been pleased if it had been anyone else but Edward. Now I felt only the cheapness of the trick, as though my learning singing were all a sham, and I longed to confess it. But my mother came in. Edward got up politely and handed her to a chair.

It's so strange to me, he said to my mother, that in all the years at our house I never heard Lise sing, except odd snatches as she went about the house—we none of us dreamt she would be a singer.

Ach, so? (My mother often adopted a slight foreignness of accent when talking to English strangers, particularly non-musical ones.)- I think I can count on Lise as a discovery. A discovery in two senses—as a singer and as a daughter—for

you know, my dear Edward—what a long time it seems since I saw you, but I suppose I may still call you Edward?—you know, she was almost a stranger to me when I came back from Germany. More a member of your family than her own.

I suppose so, said Edward solemnly, and looked at me, to see, perhaps, if any trace of family likeness remained.

What are you doing in Town? I asked, not knowing what to say to him.

I've come up to a sale for my father. I shall be doing that sort of thing quite often now. He's partly retired.

You're going into your father's business, then? asked my mother. Let me see, what was it? A book-selling business?

No, said Edward. A jeweller's.

A jeweller's? Is there much sale of jewels in Lodmouth?

Edward smiled faintly.

Most of the work is watch-repairing.

I knew my mother was not in the least interested in the Yeo business, and hoped that Edward's fanatical passion for old clocks would not lead him into a long dissertation on the subject, but he was observing my mother closely and said no more.

How are your parents? I asked.

Edward looked puzzled and I felt myself blush, more than a little ashamed for referring to them in this formal manner. My mother's attempt to cover my blunder was not helpful.

Lise loved them so dearly, she cried. She speaks of them continually, even now.

I am glad to hear that her affection has survived six months, at least.

I had not credited Edward with a gift for sarcasm and, being unprepared for it, it gave me just the wound he had intended. I could feel tears rising to my eyes, and in acute discomfort I exclaimed:

I ought to have written to them! Oh, Edward, I am sorry. They must think me horribly forgetful and—and ungrateful.

They—we (I noticed the change of pronoun) think you

must be very absorbed in your training. I expect it is very hard work.

Oh, but I ought to have written, I repeated miserably.

What? cried my mother. Have you never written to the Yeos since you came to live with me?

Well, I wrote once or twice at first, I confessed. But I haven't written for some time.

Oh, Lise! For shame! said my mother reproachfully. If I had known, I'd have had something to say about it, Edward. And they were so good to you. Lise, I insist you write tomorrow.

It won't be necessary, perhaps, said Edward. I was actually bringing an invitation——

But at that moment the tea arrived and a minute later there was a tap at the door and Felix entered in a light overcoat, his black Homburg in his hand.

Oh dear! Germaine didn't tell me you had a visitor. Perhaps I shall be in the way.

Not at all, Felix, said my mother. Ring for Germaine, Lise dear, and we'll get another cup. Do sit down, Felix. I must introduce you, Edward Yeo—Felix Harradine.

The events of the day had made me so ill-satisfied with myself that I had, almost for the first time in the six months, a little attention to spare for someone other than myself. I found I was looking at my mother and Felix with a new observance. I was certain that Felix had not been out, for I had heard him playing at the top of the house not much more than half an hour before Edward came. The scene which was now enacted at the tea-table was one which I had observed several times before and I had thought little of it. Hitherto, I had myself been one of the actors, if not upon the stage itself, at least waiting in the wings. Now, with a new detachment, I found myself in the audience. It was the presence of Edward which induced this attitude. On previous occasions his place in the room had been taken by one or several persons strange to me or at least known only slightly, and I was in their regard one of the ménage. But the close-

ness of my ties with Edward and his family not only detached me from my own environment and attracted me into his orbit, but made it difficult for him to regard me as others did. Here then was the usual scene behind the proscenium arch in all its artificiality, but with myself on the other side of the curtain. Felix had, of course, little idea of Edward's position, in fact he seemed to have forgotten the name of Yeo.

My word, what a wonderful tea you always brew, Madame Reinhart, he began, sipping appreciatively, and then, turning to Edward: Madame Reinhart knows exactly how I like it and this is the only house in London where the tea is tolerable. That's why I come here so often.

Really? said Edward politely. He looked puzzled.

I gripped the arms of my chair. Was this how the scene appeared from the house? I could hardly believe my eyes.

However, Felix was proceeding suavely, I must drink my tea and be gone. I can see that you and Madame Reinhart want to talk.

If M—er—Madame Reinhart (Edward rose to the occasion nobly) will excuse me saying so, I really came to talk to Lise as much as to her.

Then perhaps I might stay and—divert Madame Reinhart, said Felix, setting down his cup. He looked at my mother as though giving her a cue, but she said nothing. I knew what he was waiting for. It was at this point that my mother usually explained who he was and referred in laudatory but vague terms to his compositions. A little nonplussed by her silence Felix began again.

You've heard Lise sing, I suppose?

Strangely enough, as I have been telling Madame Reinhart, I never have heard Lise sing.

I wonder what you will think of her voice.

Oh, I'm no judge, said Edward. I'm totally unmusical.

I suppose I can hardly claim to be a judge of voices myself, went on Felix, trying to hold Edward's attention, which was plainly wandering. My line is rather different.

Edward did not ask what it was and Felix ploughed on manfully. He must have wondered who this laconic and totally unmusical man was. Perhaps he hoped that he was a new and rare species of agent—one who admitted his limitations.

I hope that one day Lise will sing my songs.

I could see that Felix did not enjoy saying this, but how else was he to introduce the fact that he was a composer, with so little help from the other members of the circle?

Do you write the words, or the music, or both? asked Edward, with mild curiosity.

The music only, said Felix stiffly.

Oh, said Edward. He looked at Felix as he might have done at a clock he did not wish to buy, and then turned to my mother.

I was the bearer of an invitation, he said. I was just going to mention it when tea was brought in and we were interrupted.

I'm sorry, said Felix, getting up.

Oh, Felix! cried my mother. Don't be so stupid. Sit down again, please.

I felt all my sympathies go out to him and the whole scene was becoming so painful to me that I wished Edward would go and thus terminate it.

If you'll excuse me, said Felix, looking at my mother as though she had dealt him a mortal wound, and, nodding briefly to Edward, he left the room. His hat was still beside his chair and, before my mother could stop me, I picked it up and ran after him. He was standing at the hall door, breathing rather heavily. As I handed him his hat, he gripped my wrist and said in a low voice:

Who is that buffoon having tea with your mother?

He's not a buffoon, I retorted, with instinctive loyalty. He's a kind of cousin, a—like a brother, in fact. I lived with his family when I was a child.

Ah, I remember now. Stupid of me. Edward Yeo, of course. That outlandish name ought' to have told me. But

your mother mumbles so, I didn't catch it clearly. So that was the environment we took you from. My God, not before it was time.

This was difficult to bear.

You don't understand, I protested.

Oh, my dear Lise, I understand very well. However, no matter. I only wish I had known it when I came in. I feel I have made a fool of myself and that is indescribably painful to me.

His grip on my wrist tightened and my sympathy for him increased with the pressure of my blood.

No, you didn't, Felix. You didn't. Edward noticed nothing. He's not a bit interested in music and if you'd said you were Edward Elgar it probably wouldn't have meant anything to him.

I'm going out, said Felix.

I could not do without Felix. Only for him could I peg the string of my ambition to the required pitch. If Edward's visit was, as I suspected, going to involve me in a visit to Lodmouth, somehow I must convey to Felix that it was against my will, that I had, spiritually, cast off for ever Edward Yeo, Lodmouth and all my past and desired only to become a singer for his sake.

I want to talk to you, Felix. Must you go out? Edward will have gone soon.

Obviously he is going to invite you to Lodmouth, said Felix. And of course you will go. Perhaps it is your true environment, as I told you once.

Oh, no! I cried. It isn't! It isn't!

Then refuse to go.

I—perhaps I shan't be able to. After all, I did live with them for years.

You must learn to shake dust off your feet, Lise. It is one of the first things an artist has to learn. You can't be encumbered with the past.

We can't talk about it here, I said desperately. May I come up and see you when he has gone?

No, you may not, answered Felix bluntly. He stared at me. He seemed to be weighing me up.

Look, when I come back about half-past six, will you be in the music-room practising?

I don't know.

Will you try to arrange that?

I'll try.

Then, I'll come into the music-room if I can avoid your mother.

Again this delicious secrecy. My heart was stirred, and I felt immeasurably strengthened, as though by a glass of wine.

Felix went out and I returned to the drawing-room.

Edward has just told me of a very kind invitation from his parents, Lise.

I put polite enquiry into my face, but my mind was following Felix down the street.

Mr. and Mrs. Yeo have suggested that you spend a few weeks at Folliotts now the hot weather has come.

Oh, Edward, how kind of them. But, Mother, I can't go off for several weeks. There are my lessons.

I felt secure now in my world. But my mother had a mine for my newly-erected ramparts.

Well, Lise, I was thinking. I believe it would do you good. And as you've just given up your lessons with Lili Rosenberg and haven't yet started with a new teacher it seems such an opportunity. You could start again in September. After all, we might have difficulty in finding a teacher in Town in August.

I did not know what to say; I was aware of memories of a kind of happiness, a quality of content, which seemed to have been absent from my life for six months. Yet I did not want to leave London. I knew that my singing lessons had little to do with it. It was not an interruption to them that I feared, but an interruption to something far more delicate, something which perhaps could not come to growth if it were checked at this moment. Yet reaching out from my old life were hands which, my instinct told me, might not be

so ready to give me a welcome again if I refused them now. I think that I had never before been faced with so clear a conflict. Till now, my life had been ordered for me either by circumstances or people. I had been slow to form opinions—indeed was still unformed and ignorant—and even slower to discover in myself very definite preferences or wants or likings. Now I found myself wanting two things at once, and I had no standard by which to judge which might be of the more profit to me. I was discovering the pains of divided allegiance. I prevaricated miserably.

I would like to go, of course, but wasn't my singing more important? Yet, on the other hand, I had worked very hard for six months, and no doubt a rest would do me good and set me up for the winter. But Lodmouth was terrible in August, wasn't it? Might I not come back more exhausted than I went? And as for an enforced holiday, might I not lose by lack of practice all the ground I had gained in London? I threw these sentences, like struggling kittens, into the pond of conversation, and saw them drowned one by one.

We have a piano, you know, said Edward gently. It would be possible for you to practise.

I think Edward perceived my indecision even if he did not understand the reason for it—indeed, how could he? Despite his quite unassuming manner, Edward was a man of absolute decision and, where others take long to make up their minds, his mind reviewed matters rapidly and came to its choice, not with that ill-judged impulsiveness which characterises some men but with an inherent rightness, for Edward seemed to possess within himself some valid and well-adjusted delicate instrument for weighing up alternative courses and finding with rapidity and exactitude that which had the most to commend it.

And so it was that, after a few moments of this painfully indecisive conversation, Edward rose to his feet and looking down on us both said, with a slight smile: I have a suggestion to make (but he made it sound like a settled thing). There

is a train to Lodmouth at six-thirty. I was intending to go back on it myself. Let Lise come with me.

But your parents won't expect me, I protested.

They can be telephoned, said Edward calmly.

I can't be ready in the time. Oh no, it's impossible, I cried.

But my mother was delighted with the idea. Edward rose in her estimation and for quite the wrong reason. She had no perception of that deliberate quality of mind which enabled him to take decisions not from impulse but from calculation. She thought it a suggestion springing from the heart and recognised in Edward a flash of that impulsive bohemianism which she admired. Moreover, accustomed as she was to my father's sudden moves and decisions, such an idea was after her own heart. She had a quite impersonal delight in bustle and movement, valuing it for its own sake because, she averred, movement was life—a phrase which was one of her articles of faith.

I found her, therefore, allying herself wholeheartedly with Edward and my own objections were firmly overruled. I was compelled to hurry upstairs and get out the clothes I needed. Edward mounted to the loft to find a couple of suitcases while my mother bustled round me, piling up on the bed everything she thought I should require.

Edward's idea was a really splendid one, she said. It will give you a clear six weeks at least down in Lodmouth and it couldn't be a better time, now you've finished with Fräulein Rosenberg. And it will give me time to look around for another teacher and a better one. Actually, I need a holiday myself. Yes, it's all going to fit in very well. I'll take the opportunity to run over to Germany, to the Bavarian lakes. The Riviera will be too hot for me.

Felix? How was I to keep my appointment with him? At six o'clock we should be on our way to the station, Edward and I. We were to have dinner on the train. Edward's people were going to arrange for a taxi to be waiting at Lodmouth station. I turned and faced my mother.

Mother, I said, I don't want to go. Let me come to Bavaria with you.

Oh no, my dear, cried my mother instantly. That's a very bad suggestion. You and I see quite enough of each other as it is. What we need is a holiday apart from each other. It isn't good for a mother and daughter to live at such close quarters as we do for too long.

But I've never been abroad, I pressed.

Oh, you'll go abroad later, Lise. Why, you'll go abroad to study, I hope, next year. But not this year, and not with me.

I don't want to go to Lodmouth. It's a hateful idea.

I was almost weeping with vexation.

Oh, Lise! I don't know how you can be so difficult about it. Weren't you happy there during the war?

I suppose so.

Well, then.

I've outgrown them.

Nonsense! Outgrown them! Edward's a charming young man and most mature in his manner. It's ridiculous to say you've outgrown them. The boot is on the other foot.

How shrewd my mother sometimes was.

Mother, how cruel you are, I said bitterly.

Cruel? I don't mean to be. Come to me, Lise my darling. (Here my mother put her arms round me as I approached her, unwilling and now openly crying). Lise, Lise, don't cry so. Whatever is the matter?

I don't know. I don't know, I sobbed.

Well, I should say you're very overtired, and this holiday is just what you need.

A holiday, yes. But why now, now?

Oh, Lise dear (my mother quickly wearied of an emotional scene). It's settled. Edward's telephoned. The taxi's ordered. Everything's done. Do pull yourself together.

No doubt I was behaving very foolishly, very childishly. All my life I had been moved about like a pawn, and I was only now, at the age of eighteen, beginning even to resent it.

But my command of myself was unsure. I was like a child beginning to walk without support. I held out my arms only too readily to my nurses. I had nothing but my resentment and my tears to oppose to the decisions of others, and these only made me appear more childish and produced in the end an irritation in my mother which was painful to me, for I could not bear her to despise me. My tearful protests exacerbated feelings which lurked like cut-throats in the darkest woods of our personalities, as yet unseen by each other. I am glad that time separated us before they came into open conflict and brought my mother and myself into a hatred of each other which would have been inevitable.

At a quarter to six the taxi came. I had been down to the music-room several times, making excuses to fetch a piece of music, to see if I had left a book there, to shut the piano, which I was sure I had left open. I hoped that Felix might come back early and be waiting there. During only a few hours, my feeling for him had grown with that almost unnatural rapidity of a tropical plant whose buds open out into flowers palpably before the gaze. At my last visit to the music-room, I stood by the silent piano and heard my heart-beats pulsing through the room. They sounded unnaturally loud. Perhaps they awoke some sympathetic vibration amid the strings of the piano over which I leaned. I wondered whether I had time to write Felix a note and leave it for him, but I feared then that my mother might be drawn by curiosity to visit the room and I knew that nothing would stop her opening it. I heard her voice calling down the stairs, in irritated tones, Lise, where are you? Not in that music-room again? Dear child, I shall soon think you have a lover closeted there!

The taxi came and we left the house, my mother speeding us away with obvious delight. Already she was living in anticipation, leaning out from a hotel balcony overlooking some calm Bavarian lake, its surface broken only by the faint ripples created by the rising and settling of water-fowl.

I was silent during the long train journey. I ate very little

at dinner. Edward, too, did not seem in talkative mood, and his solicitous care for me, which seemed almost excessive, suggested to me that he might be a little ashamed of the peremptory way he had dragged me off on this visit against my inclinations.

Darkness fell. We passed through shadowy hills, with occasional gleams of light from remote farmhouse windows, and deserted village halts, at which the last train of the day had stopped some time before, and only the cheerful orange glow behind the curtains of the porter's cottage gave evidence of their fleeting presence. Suddenly I turned to Edward and asked him point-blank why he had insisted on bringing me down here with him.

Is that what you've been brooding on all the evening? he asked.

Partly, I answered, with perfect truth, for it was, in fact, only a corollary to my feverish thoughts about Felix.

I thought you would never come otherwise, he answered frankly.

Why should I come at all if I don't want to?

I find that rather an extraordinary thing for you to say.

I knew I had been hurtful and ungracious and I felt remorse.

Edward, you know I love Folliotts and it's—it's more of a home to me than anywhere else I've known in my life.

Then why the fuss?

I have my career to think of, you know. I can't afford to waste time having holidays.

You really feel that?

Yes.

Are you going to achieve your ambition?

How can I tell? It takes years to train a singer, and now—now—you may have jeopardised everything by forcing me to come down here.

Surely your mother, with her experience, knows best. If she had obstructed me, I assure you I wouldn't have pressed the suggestion. But after all, she was ready enough

for you to come. She didn't think it would hurt your training.

Oh, yes, I said bitterly. She seemed willing enough to get rid of me.

You are happy with her, aren't you? asked Edward quickly.

Happy? Of course I'm happy, I answered stubbornly.

Edward said no more and I was left with my own words ringing in my ears, and echoing with a curious hollowness in my skull. I was glad when we reached Lodmouth and still more glad when the door of Folliotts opened and the kindly greetings of Mr. and Mrs. Yeo, their enquiries and obvious pleasure at seeing me, sent out of my mind at least temporarily the thoughts which had been disquieting it for several hours.

I was infinitely touched, too, by the sensation of returning home. Mrs. Yeo had given me the room I had had for so many years. There was the same rather faded blue bedspread, the old books—Eliot and Jane Austen and the Brontës—in the little hanging bookcase on the wall, and on the mantelpiece a vase of dark red roses from the garden. When she kissed me good night, I went to the window and pulled back the curtain. It was a warm night, yet the warmth had none of the oppressive, dry quality which had made the summer nights in London so hard to bear. I could feel the faint breeze off the sea, and smell the pungent scent of marsh and sea-water, peaty and brackish, yet not unpleasant. The moon was not yet up, but the sky was a blaze of stars and in their light I could see the dark expanse of the marsh, and the pale gleams, like a thousand eyes, from the pools and runnels, while in the town beyond a few yellower, warmer lights still shone from the streets and esplanade. I could just distinguish the long thin ribbon of the stone pier, and the light winking at the end of it brought back to me, perhaps more vividly than anything else, the childhood days I had spent in this house. I used to see the light from my bed, winter and summer, used in fact to draw the curtains back a little after Mrs. Yeo had said good night to me, so that I

could see it, a friendly eye in the darkness, and a monotonous rhythm which helped me to go to sleep.

I came down to breakfast the following morning to find the family eating and already occupied with the day's affairs. Edward was off to a sale in a country house almost thirty miles away. Old Mr. Yeo was about to leave for the shop in Lodmouth High Street, and Mrs. Yeo had her household business to attend to. I do not mean that they did not welcome me kindly, and appear extremely pleased to see me. They were affectionate and easy. They did not overwhelm me, did not press around me or ask me questions. I might never have been away from them. Most young girls would have been only too glad of this but I was not. I had got used to being overwhelmed. Now I missed it. They had planned nothing for me. I was, it seemed, to amuse myself. Mr. Yeo did suggest, tentatively, that Edward should take me into the town on his way to the sale and drop me somewhere and I could spend the morning on the beach. I had brought bathing things? No, I had not. I had none. Having discarded the childish affair I had worn the year before, I had not found it necessary to buy another. I felt disconcerted at their lack of guidance, and the sudden relaxation of control was not the relief and delight it might have been to some people. Having for six months been ruled by an artificially stimulated sense of ambition I was now in something like the position of a chronic drug-taker whose bottle is empty. I felt a lassitude, and a craving for direction. I decided at last that I must work out for myself a regular routine. After breakfast I would read and write letters (to whom? I did not formulate a name). At about eleven I would practise singing. After lunch I would go into Lodmouth and sit on the beach, or shop. Thus, I thought, would I divide my spirit between London and Lodmouth, conceding to each a portion of my time and allegiance. Accordingly I loafed about the house for an hour or so, my thoughts circling like a flight of birds. I strolled out into the garden. Far away, I could hear the murmur of the sea on the loose pebbles. The sky appeared

to be farther off than it did in London. There seemed too much air to breathe, too much space to move in. There was no pressure about me. I was compelled to listen to my own heart, in the quiet and solitude, and the image of Felix presented itself like the blade of a knife inserted between my ribs and caused me a stab of exquisite pain. How could I establish contact with him? A dozen different schemes raced through my head. I would telephone him, I would write to him. I even contemplated running away from Lodmouth and returning home. In the end I went indoors and wrote to my mother, telling her I had arrived safely, and, after long thought, I added this postscript.

I wonder if you'd give Felix a message? He has a song of mine I rather want. Will you ask him to send it?

Now Felix had no song of mine. I invented this matter-of-fact excuse, as though to protest my casual feelings for the man, yet into each single word that I wrote—and re-read again and again before posting—I poured a prayer that he would understand the secret meaning of my message.

I then decided to practise. Mrs. Yeo did not discourage me, though she begged me not to overwork when I was supposed to be on holiday.

Oh, I said, with the airy superiority of the expert, it's important that I exercise my voice or I shall lose all the ground I have gained.

I went into the sitting-room and opened the piano. My voice sounded very odd in the low-ceilinged room, a long room running from back to front of the house with windows at each end. I struck a chord and attempted a scale. The voice sounded breathy and I was a shade flat on the last note—or was it the piano? I tried again and was depressed by the lack of resonance in the room. For several moments I remained silent. My attention had been caught by two nut-hatches scrambling up and down the pole of a pergola outside the window. Fascinated, I watched their dove-grey

forms, running swiftly up the bark like mice. Then I recalled myself to my work and began singing again, a short staccato exercise. This went a little better and, encouraged, I tried something more advanced. I thought I heard someone opening the door, and stopped in the middle of a phrase to turn round. There was no one there and I started again, nervously. My voice sounded very loud and rather unpleasant. I wondered if Mrs. Yeo could hear it and tried to sing more quietly. My throat began to close, my neck muscles to tighten, and I could hardly croak. Frustration increased my discomfort and at last I closed the piano, and, feeling considerably chagrined, I went out for a walk.

There are many houses like Folliotts, cream stucco houses, with small porticoes and gravel sweeps in front, standing in down-at-heel parkland, where dead trees are as numerous as living ones, the ornamental stream is choked and its bridges broken, and the once smooth turf is heaved into a thousand molehills and clumps of tough bristling rushes. In Folliotts' case the park was now so small as to have almost disappeared, save for a long wedge-shaped piece in front of the house, along one side of which ran the little drive, between an avenue of walnut trees. Behind the house, enclosed in yew hedges, was a pleasure garden where much that had once been cultivated had been allowed to run wild, but near the house the well-stocked flower-beds and lawns were kept trim by the Yeos themselves with the help of one gardener. Despite the fact that the Yeos had not maintained the small estate, there was no air of decay or desolation. It seemed rather that they had leased it out to nature, as they leased the walled kitchen-garden to a nurseryman, and nature made as good a job of her department as he did of his. It was a small house, with an over-sized portico, for it was originally designed with two small wings which had never been built. Not a beautiful house and not a wealthy house.

It was a curious experience for me to see it again after six months, not long in time but immensely distant in spirit. If I had never been there before, I should perhaps have had a

fairer assessment of its charms, but I had lived there in the unnoticing years of childhood, when we absorb without seeing intellectually, when we take a turning because we feel we must, not because we notice the name of the road, and enter a shop for its smell or because, simply, our footsteps linger as we pass. It was the most permanent home I had ever known. It contained everything I knew of love and care and tenderness and natural family affection. It supplied not merely material comforts but a way of life, sober, orderly and principled. From this environment I had been removed, not against my will, which might have made my return to it most poignantly tender to me, but with my full acquiescence. I had abandoned Folliotts very readily, impelled by a side of my nature which had been quiescent here but undoubtedly living, and which had responded as quickly to my mother's call as a bird to the bird-catcher's whistle. On that score alone my return would have been uncomfortable to me, for I bore within me a barely-recognised sense of guilt towards Folliotts.

Strolling out into the garden, I walked down the sloping lawn in front of the house to the pond. I stood among the birches at its edge, and felt an irritable reluctance to surrender myself to the pull of memories which I thought I had put behind me. I looked up at the house, its yellowing plaster front, the absurd portico and empty pediment, yet while I stared at it and condemned its pseudo-Palladian chilliness, my heart cried traitor to my thought, for there is not a warmer, friendlier house in the world. I deliberately fastened my attention on the external detail. I stared at that house as though it had been a mere cardboard façade, yet my instinct and every sensory tip of my nerves filled out the shell into a living entity. The walnut trees, the little muddy stream, and the pond with its water very shallow now in the summer heat and covered with scum and water-flies—no, I could not criticise it all.

Though unable to bring an opinion of my own to bear on it, I tried to imagine what my mother would think of it, and

what Felix would think of it. I knew neither of them well enough to forecast their reactions, and my critical faculty, nourished on nothing but clichés gathered from my mother's circle, struggled unsuccessfully with my own sense of peace and contentment, in the sweet especial rural scene. I would not have had a single blade of grass altered. Yet the very fact that I felt a conflict within me made it difficult for me to give myself up to the full enjoyment of my stay, and I found it even more difficult to attune myself to the spiritual atmosphere of Folliotts. To them I seemed very changed. My standards were now those of my mother. I had adopted them and thought them indispensable to my life as a musician.

If I had been a more perceptive, mature child during my teens, I might have imbibed from the Folliotts way of life moral principles and mental attitudes too firm to have been overset by the cheap attraction of bohemianism, and a false bohemianism at that, but the Yeos lived their principles, they did not attempt to instil or preach them, and though I had in fact imbibed more than I thought and found that in the end even that little survived, still, at the time of my visit, I was besotted by the idea that ordinary morality was stuffy and Victorian, and that there was virtue in the shallow unconventionality which my mother professed to admire.

An incident that happened two or three days after I arrived will serve to illustrate my point and show what a person I was at the time. How the Yeos tolerated me at all I do not know. At breakfast, Mrs. Yeo asked her husband to leave her some money, as she had run short of ready cash and had no time to go into the bank.

I'm so afraid I shan't have enough for Mullen's wages, she said.

I had finished eating and was listening to the conversation. I felt this preoccupation with money to be essentially provincial, and typical of shopkeepers' mentality.

Mother's always forgetting to pay Germaine, I said.

Who is Germaine? asked Mr. Yeo, with ominous politeness. Nothing daunted, I continued blithely, Oh, she's a

Swiss girl. I believe she gets a pound a week, but Mother forgets to pay her and then she loses her temper and swears at us in French. It's terribly funny. She just doesn't understand artists, of course.

There was a silence, so I went on, thinking that I was opening for the Yeos a window on to a brighter and enviable world:

When she gets as far as saying, *Si c'est comme ça, je fiche le camp!* Mother knows she has to pay her.

Mr. Yeo cleared his throat, rose from the table and left the room, looking with abstracted concentration at his newspaper as he did so.

Oh dear, cried Mrs. Yeo, he hasn't given me the money now. He's as forgetful as—your mother, Lise—she ended with an effort.

Edward handed her two pound notes from his wallet and left the room also and I could not feel altogether pleased. My mother's behaviour seemed rather shabby now and I remembered how Fräulein Rosenberg had not been paid and what short shrift my mother had given to my timid protest. I remembered dunning bills from tradesmen which my mother laughingly tossed into the waste-paper basket. I remembered the gas men coming to turn off the gas because the account had not been paid since we entered the house and my mother, lying back in her *négligé* on the sofa, talking most charmingly with the two embarrassed officials.

You'll soon become friends of mine, she said. Lise, pour out some beer for them.

And then, when they had drunk the beer, she paid the account in full and sent them away. For my mother was not short of money. It was a part she played, a part she felt necessary to her prestige as an important person in the artistic life of London. Had she married another man, she might easily have been the most punctilious *châtelaine* and kept meticulous accounts, for there was nothing in her nature which compelled her to neglect bills. In fact, I sometimes thought it was quite an effort to her. She told the

story of the gas men's arrival, her reception of them, how nervous she felt lying in front of them on the sofa with nothing on but her pyjamas and silk dressing-gown. The tale was told over and over again to different bodies of friends, until I found it embarrassing to listen to it. Yet I, at the first opportunity, used a similar story for much the same purpose, to enforce a recognition of my spurious bohemianism. I was discontented, however, with the result.

If the Yeos, particularly Edward, were puzzled or disappointed at the difference in me, they hardly gave me any indication of the fact. The most I was aware of was silence, and it was not so much the silence of disapproval as of necessity. They had nothing to say, no comment to make about my life in London. They did not regard it as within their province to interfere, and since they could not speak in approbation of it, they preferred to say nothing. Thus my stories of the bohemian life, recounted with such readiness at first, and with such an air of garrulous excitement, died through inanition and after three or four days I was tolerably quiet and composed and less anxious to force upon them my new-found values and more willing to accept and appreciate theirs. My nervous tension relaxed and I regained something—though it was not a great deal—of the contentment of my childhood. My singing exercises I dropped altogether. Instead, I lay out in a deck-chair under the birches overlooking the pond, and watched the water-birds which flew in from the marsh, and idled away the time in the sun. I think that if I could have been debarred from any communication with my mother's world during these weeks, the weight of a routine based on a quiet family life might have brought me to a better balance. The pace of the violent ambition which drove me on might have run down a little. But I was profoundly disturbed when I arrived, and my mind and heart were irritated by the continual sense of something alien within me, which would not let me forget it, which prevented my contentment from taking root. This indissoluble node, this ganglion festering upon my nerves,

made me everlastingly aware of the fearful division between myself and my environment.

The disturbance was increased by a parcel which came about a week after my own arrival. It was a roll of something rather carelessly tied up with little odds and ends of string. I knew the handwriting to be that of Felix and I could not trust myself to open the packet at the breakfast table.

It's some music that I ordered, I lied, and pushed the parcel away carelessly from my plate.

The Yeos were not curious. They asked no questions and I was able to take the packet away to my room.

When I put that brief postscript to my mother's letter I do not know what I expected. Certainly I did not think Felix would take the words at their face value. I must have imagined that he reckoned as little of words as I did, and fed, chameleon-like, on the air which carried them from the mouth of the speaker. Now that I had his reply, I feared to open it and see those inexorable instruments, words. If I could have found within some paper of cabbalistic signs to which I had no key, I believe I should have been happier. Unable to bring myself to open the parcel yet, I put it away in a drawer and went shopping with Mrs. Yeo.

Was the music what you wanted? she asked.

Yes, thank you, I replied.

After lunch, I went alone into Lodmouth and took the parcel with me. I felt a conspirator as I left the house, for the roll was too large to go into my pocket and I had had to wrap it up in a towel and pretend that I was going to buy a bathing suit in Lodmouth and have a swim. I went down to the old harbour where Edward and I had played as children. Now I looked at it with new eyes. Before, it had been no more than a scene against which we enacted childish games. It provided the authentic background for pirates, castaways and smugglers. It had delights unobtainable elsewhere, and was a kind of Eldorado for our curiosity, with its shop-windows, many of them below the pavement, displaying

sweets sold nowhere else—gob-stoppers and liquorice boot-laces—and those special harbour necessities, fishing-tackle, live bait, seamen's jerseys and boots, rope, twine and boat varnish. Now for the first time I saw it, not as a background almost as familiar as Folliotts, but as a scene with the exotic quality of a foreign port, in which I was a stranger. Even the language I heard spoken around me fell with an alien quality upon my ear. I was conscious of the stares of the old men in their peaked caps, and the remoter, indifferent glances of the navvies unloading a cargo. Yet I did not feel lonely or rebuffed. Into this world I was bringing my own, in the shape of a small tightly-rolled parcel, as the English traveller abroad mitigates his exile with a copy of *The Times* and carries England into foreign parts as he unfurls its pages.

I did not go on as far as the stone pier. I sat on an iron seat near the water's edge, in the shadow of the marine fortress which rises above the harbour, with thickly-wooded slopes. Around me tarry chains gleamed in the sun, the ferry-boat was being oared across the oily water, and on the pier opposite rose three cranes, sharply etched in black against the sky. No boat was in on that side of the harbour. The waterside railway was silent, the cranes still. The hot metal gave off a shimmer which set the windows of the warehouses and the harbour buildings quaking. My fingers were hot. They trembled like the windows as I untied the string of the parcel. Slowly I unrolled it. Inside was some music manuscript paper, cool and smooth to the touch, like shaded stone. I flattened it out on my lap, wondering. The corner of a small piece of notepaper stuck out from between the sheets. I pulled it out. It curled quickly in the heat, and I had to smooth it down over my knee, while the brown paper and the music manuscript fell on to the grass beside me and rolled itself up again.

Lise, I read. No greeting. No "dear Lise" or "my dear Lise." Simply my name.

Lise, your mother tells me I have a song of yours. I have

no idea what this can be, but here is a song for you. I wrote it—I will not tell you in what mood—when I came home and found you had gone off to Lodmouth. Forget the hard things I said about your cousin Edward. I believe you have done the right thing.

You will find the words of the song difficult to understand, so I will translate them roughly for you:

The folksongs of my old home  
weigh down my heart and  
fill me with sadness.

At night in your dreams  
You hear the song of the lad  
as he hoes potatoes.

However far away from home  
You may travel, after years  
the song returns to haunt you.

Grow some roots while you are in Lodmouth, my dear Lise. That is what I cannot do. Grow roots, and you will never be haunted by the potato lad's song.

My love to you,  
FELIX.

I think I hardly took in what I was reading. I do not know what I expected. Whatever it was, it was not this. Then I saw a small p.t.o. at the bottom of the notepaper. The postscript which I found on the back set my heart beating faster than anything Felix had said in the body of the letter.

Write and tell me how you like the song. But, Lise, don't write to me here. Write to me Poste Restante, Ebury Street Post Office. Do you mind this little deception?

Mind it? My whole being responded with an upwelling of emotion. The harbour scene before me, already hazy, was

transfigured. No longer was this Lodmouth, where Edward and I had grown up through our childhood. It was the fortunate place where I received Felix's letters, the place where my thoughts would grow round him like a tree. I was no longer conscious of any pain of separation from him, for here we had been brought together by his letter and song.

Every time I looked down at the letter on my knee and read the words of the postscript, I could feel a kind of electric shock running through me, and naïvely I repeated the sensation over and over again, quite deliberately, till I was weary. So new to me were physical sensations of this kind, for my feelings were hitherto unawakened and sensually I was as ignorant as I was inexperienced. At last I folded up my letter and studied the song. I was far less interested in this, even though I felt it had been inspired by myself.

It started in the accompaniment with a phrase in quavers, very low down in the bass, a phrase with a folksong flavour about it. It was a seven-bar phrase which gave it a curiously expectant quality. When I later played it through, I found the entry of the voice, with no supporting accompaniment (for this had faded into silence like the boy's song), unbearably poignant. The words were by Rilke:

*Mich rührt so sehr  
böhmischen Volkes Weise,  
schleicht sie ins Herz sich leise  
macht sie es schwer.*

*Wenn ein Kind sacht  
singt beim Kartoffeljäten  
klingt dir sein Lied im späten  
Traum noch der Nacht.*

*Magst du auch sein  
weit über Land gefahren,  
fällt es dir noch nach Jahren  
stets wieder ein.*

The time came for me to return to Folliotts to lunch and in the afternoon I went to the piano and tried over the song. It seemed to me one of the most beautiful pieces of music I had ever heard. I could sing it now, and though it no longer seems to possess quite the qualities of genius I ascribed to it then, I believe it was one of the best things Felix ever wrote and one in which he most nearly approached those heights he so much desired and never reached.

I was now so happy at Folliotts that my kind hosts were delighted and Mrs. Yeo confided in me, the next day, that she had feared I was finding it dull down there after my London life, but now, she believed, I was really looking better for the change. I hugged my secret to myself, and felt a delicious superiority in knowing that the change was not due to her or to Lodmouth air, but to new emotions which were making me almost light-headed.

My felicity was to prove short-lived. When, after reading and re-reading my letter at intervals of every few hours for a day and a half, I came to the second evening of perusal, the warmth suddenly went out of it. I wondered if I had not read too much into it, wished I had not posted my reply, felt certain he would despise it and would not write again—in short, went through in miniature a series of torments which were to continue with me for some time, differing only in degree but not in kind, as my love for Felix became more obsessive, but never lost those attributes of gratitude and wonder which stamped it indelibly as first love.

What had I written in my reply, my first letter to Felix? I have no recollection now of the exact words, but I do remember one or two things about that letter. I remember that I wrote and re-wrote it, sitting on the sands. I could not have chosen a more crowded and public place. Around me were ranks of deck-chairs; dogs bounded over my feet; children rushed savagely past and round me; families picnicked with accompanying cries; elderly couples dozed and snored; young people talked in high-pitched voices, and laughed penetrating, metallic laughs. In the midst of it, I sat

oblivious, withdrawn into myself, rather enjoying my new-found pleasure in planting not merely myself but my own microcosm in the midst of the everyday world. I think the pressure of people round me helped me to withdraw and concentrate my personality upon one point. Had I gone to some solitary place, where the need to withdraw exerted no compulsion on me, I should have been like an airman who as he flies higher and higher finds discomfort from the lessening of the pressure upon his body and may even bleed at the nose and ears.

So I sat, writing and re-writing. I used a great many pages, or half-used them. They came loose from the block and fell in the sand around me, but at last I finished a draft that pleased me and after copying it carefully in my bedroom I put it in an envelope and stamped it. Even then I did not post it at once. I walked up and down the esplanade, passing and re-passing the pillar-box. As I walked I repeated phrases from the letter and wondered if I had put them in the best possible way. My letter was, as far as I can recollect, in strict imitation of Felix's. Not liking to start "dear" or "dearest" or "darling Felix," I began something like this:

Thank you for your letter, Felix, and for the song. Then I answered meticulously—and quite unnecessarily—every point, almost every phrase of his letter. I, too, added a postscript.

Of course I don't mind sending this to the Poste Restante. Much daring, I added, Why?—and crossed it out and wrote it in again.

The letter was posted and I eagerly awaited another one from Felix. I used to go to the harbour and search out again the seat on which I had first read his letter. I read it and re-read it and doubts and misgivings alternated with confidence and tremulous hope. What response would my own letter evoke from him?

At the end of my first fortnight there, on a Saturday, Edward made an announcement intended to be for me a most pleasant surprise.

I haven't had a holiday yet, he said. I'm starting it—on Monday.

If Edward has a fault, it is this delight in springing surprises on people. He smiled a little now, pleased at his stratagem. I suppose my face fell, for a puzzled look came into his eyes. He began to speak, but so did I, in an effort to cover myself, and we came out together with the opening of sentences neither of which was intelligible to the other. There was a slight pause. I knew I should say something, but in my hand was another letter from Felix, which had arrived that morning and was still unread, and I could not make the mental adjustment quickly enough. I saw that Edward was hurt, and at last—too late—my preoccupied mind delivered from its ill-furnished stock some well-worn cliché—it may have been nothing more than, How lovely, Edward!

But Edward had walked away and I did not see him for the rest of the morning. Torn between anticipation and dread, I took my letter upstairs. I was not so long opening this one. Inside was a torn piece of music manuscript paper and on it:

In great haste. Your mother has decided to leave tonight. She insists on [here some words were scratched out] my escorting her. Write to me Poste Restante, Lucerne. We're going there first. Your mother has some idea of getting another Swiss maid. Germaine has left and we now have two horse-faced women from Hounslow. No time to get to the P.O. here so I hope you haven't written.

FELIX.

Stupefied, I stared at the letter. Then I was conscious of a constricting pain in my chest such as I had never felt before. It grew in intensity as though someone were drawing a rope round my arms and shoulders. The pain spread into my neck and my jaw muscles. But no relief from tears was given me. I stood rigid, still holding the torn scrap of paper, staring as though from it radiated those tentacles which

engripped me. I read it a second time; the plain signature, Felix, almost garotted me.

With what minute observation do we scrutinise these early letters, as though each word, each letter, contained the clue to the secret we long to discover. A lover bears about him a mystery, or is it that women create a mystery around him lest intimacy should render him commonplace? The closer he approaches the further he recedes from our understanding, or again, is it we who recede? I felt further from comprehending Felix than I had ever done. I summed up all I knew about him, went over every scene, every conversation I had ever had with him, accumulated like a detective all the scraps of evidence I could muster and still I was no nearer the certainty I desired. Baulked in my search I resorted to fantasy. I invented for Felix the emotions I thought proper to the situation, and by the time lunch came I had persuaded myself that Felix must have gone too early for my letter and found none; must be deeply hurt that I had not replied. Once I had discovered for myself or invented (to be truthful) a reason for the abrupt coolness of his second letter, I was able to turn upon myself in the form of remorse the bitterness I had been feeling against Felix throughout the morning.

Poor Felix, and his letter waiting for him in the Poste Restante at Ebury Street all the time.

I went to lunch in a calmer frame of mind, and was glad to find that Edward had returned and seemed to have forgotten the slight I had put upon him earlier that day. His holiday did not really begin till Monday, since Saturday and Sunday were spent working to finish off certain jobs he did not wish to leave to others.

I realise that I have said very little about Mr. and Mrs. Yeo. I can see them very distinctly and I have a clear impression—how could I have otherwise?—of their unfailing kindness to me, and indeed of other characteristics in so far as they touched myself. Thus I see them always in their surroundings, against a flowery garden, with the smooth

downs behind, or in the long sitting-room, with the windows framing the dark green of the marsh, and marsh and sky divided by a thin line of blue sea, as though drawn in ink with a broad-nibbed pen. Mr. Yeo was a small, dapper man, with grey hair and a brown, finely-drawn face. The texture of his skin was of that soft, thin nature which is invariably smooth with very little bristle. As befits a watch-maker, his hands were delicately made and well kept. He was a cheerful little man, extremely courteous and affable in manner. But I could not tell you what books he read or what interests he had, if indeed he had any outside the old family business to which he was devoted and the house, Folliotts, which he had bought soon after his marriage. He was known everywhere. He was a J.P. and a member of many local societies. Yet when I have said this, I have said nothing of the man himself. With the extreme selfishness of my age, reinforced in my case by an artificial otherness, I was only aware of the Yeos when they said or did something related to myself.

As for Mrs. Yeo, my picture is no more interesting. She was a woman with a distinct turn for humour. She was not, you must understand, particularly jolly or cheerful in her general bearing. In fact, she was a grave-looking woman when her face was in repose, and very gentle in her manner. Yet she rarely spoke without a lively interest and concern showing in her features and voice, and such keen enjoyment and shrewd judgment enlivened whatever subject she was discussing that she communicated to those about her a part of her own contentment and happiness. This happiness came not so much from a cheerful, bustling personality, which she did not possess, as from an inner detachment and sense of proportion which enabled her to bring to bear upon reverses, even griefs, a gentle sense of irony. Had she been a shade more detached she might have been cold and repelling, but she was of such a delicately balanced nature that she was able, without leaning too far in either direction, to be ironical where her own reverses were concerned and compassionate towards those of others. How little I appreciated

her when I lived with her! As I have grown older, her qualities have never faded from my mind, as those of many people, even my mother, have done. They have grown with me, as though they were a many-flowered plant rooted in my heart.

With its sobriety, its orderliness and balance, there was something of a watch's precision about the household. Folliotts could hardly have been in greater contrast to my London life, but it had the virtue that there was nothing proselytising about it. It did not force or impose its own order upon those in contact with it. Had I been a genuine artist, had my habits been unconventional and bohemian to excess, Folliotts would have welcomed me without criticism or comment, and taken me to its heart, for though, like a watch, it was delicate and even finicking in detail, it was not lifeless. It moved and grew and breathed, and to some purpose.

In my childhood, Lodmouth was to me just a seaside town, a place of wind and sun and pleasure, a prolonged seaside holiday. There was the esplanade, wide and formal, a-glitter with coloured lights in the summer evenings which made the whole bay a fairyland. There were the gardens, with little grimy, hot-smelling shelters of rustic design in which basked fat spiders and drowsy, sun-steeped flies. They were the castles of our games, the dens of giants, the prisons wherein I, a captive maiden, languished, and from which Edward rescued me. The bay was full of shipping. I could see its full sweep from my bedroom window, and when in the early summer evenings I was put to bed, I could watch the sun touching the grey cliffs of St. Aldhelm's Head, and lying across the leaden waters in a long shaft of iridescent rose. Folliotts was situated rather far out of Lodmouth itself, at the foot of the rising downs. It was separated from the town proper by a wide marsh, across which there was at that time only a track unsuitable for anything bigger than a pony cart, so that cars (there were only a few of them then) had to go out on the main road and round by the sea wall into the

town. Near us were scattered cottages and a farm, once the home farm of the house, and already by 1914 several residences had been built by gentlemen who wished to live outside Lodmouth. The house, although it did not stand very high, commanded an unbroken view across the marsh, the sea wall and the bay beyond, while on one side the land fell away to the sea in tumbled grey cliffs, and on the other it gently declined to the harbour mouth and the estuary of the Lode.

The Yeo shop still stands in the High Street, looking exactly the same as it looked when I was a child, and no doubt much the same as it looked when it was first built in the eighteenth century and the paint of the name of Yeo was still fresh. Like many other Lodmouth shops, it is bow-windowed. There, to the delight of several generations of Lodmouth children, stands an elaborate Victorian time-piece, cast in bronze, the figure of an old countryman in smock frock and felt hat, wreathed with flowers. He leads a stout collie dog, whose tail wags and whose red tongue pants in and out of his open mouth as the watch set in his back ticks the seconds. This fascinating curiosity was only one of many which the Yeo family had collected over the years and to which they were far too attached to dream of selling. I had longed inordinately for that clock as a child, and had more than once suggested that my father was quite rich enough to pay for it. But Mr. Yeo had only laughed at me. He was as little impressed (or offended) by my boasting at ten years old as he was by my assumed bohemianism at nineteen. Inside, the shop was filled with dusty oddities, which different Yeos had been unable to resist buying and then unwilling to part with, once bought. They loved talking about them to customers, and a whole collection of stories had grown up around these objects. The blunderbuss which Harry Yeo, Edward's grandfather, had bought in a country sale and used to threaten a burglar with the very night after he had brought it home; the collection of coins picked up on the Long Beach, mainly by Yeo children of previous

generations, and to which Edward had contributed a fine silver doubloon of Spain. It was actually found by me, but I let Edward have it in exchange for a little silver brooch which I coveted and which I have to this day. It is a posy of flowers in a basket, made of marcasite.

I never went into the shop once during my stay that August. I don't believe I even paused at its window to see the panting, tail-wagging dog. My tastes had undergone a change, and I did not think that Felix would be interested in the dog.

On Sunday I wrote another letter to Felix. I did not feel able to put into this second letter quite all I had put into the first, which lay in a London post office. When I remembered it, indeed, I was almost relieved that he had never seen it. One thing I know I wrote:

Edward is taking a fortnight's holiday tomorrow.

Isn't it too bad? I like being by myself so much better. Though there's one thing that would be better still.

But I could not be more explicit. In this letter, though I was only a few days older, I had learned a little to withhold, to conceal, to hint.

On Monday morning Edward came down to breakfast in grey flannels and coloured shirt. He was as enthusiastic to begin his holiday as he was over everything else he undertook. I think I have never known anyone who has such a capacity for enjoyment as Edward, and he has not arrived at this through philosophy or religion. It is in his nature, as is his religion and philosophy also. Edward has curiosity and an observant eye which both delights to search and delights in what it finds. He never succumbs to the hurry and insanity of modern speed. If a thing needs doing quickly, he will do it, for he is a rapid thinker, but nothing is too slow or detailed to break his patience, and he is not diverted by prejudice from looking at anything. Even at the age of about twenty-two, as he was then, he had an extensive knowledge of all

kinds of subjects and, as it was a knowledge acquired by observation and discovery, it was part of himself. It enriched him and because he was not in the least loquacious or didactic it made him a delightful companion, or could have done so, had I given him the chance. I was too restless, too anxious to impress him with my conception of the artistic life, which, as I had little positive to offer, took the inevitable course of despising other people's way of life. I was unwilling to concede that this provincial town and remote, unexploited countryside could give anything of value to me. And yet underneath my scorn and indifference I had no basis of conviction. I found it hard not to love Edward's country, not to respond to Folliotts and Lodmouth. I refused to surrender, in the mistaken view that I would lose my artistic integrity (which did not exist) if I did. I kept reminding myself how much I was missing London, missing music and my lessons, and my mother's friends, with their talk and their theories and their jargon. Yet I did not go near the piano in the drawing-room after the third or fourth day of my visit.

At breakfast on Monday morning Edward asked me if there was anything particular I would like to do. A year ago, I should have replied promptly. Now the ambivalence of my mood acted as a brake. I did not know what to suggest. Something in me longed to cry out to Edward, Let's go out for the day on the moor, or Let's take a boat out, but destroying my response before it even reached my tongue was my uncertainty as to what my artistic response *ought* to be. For some time now my mother had answered all the questions addressed to me, and I had such faith in her infallibility that I accepted without question any decision she made. Now, even over such a simple question as What shall we do today? I was unable to make up my mind, for my old tastes and enthusiasms had been laid aside and dared not show their heads for fear of the scorn of my newly-acquired artistic conscience.

Edward misinterpreted my hesitation and added, I do<sup>n't</sup>

know when you want to do your singing practice, of course. We needn't go off anywhere till that's over.

I felt myself blushing. Only Mrs. Yeo knew that I had done no singing for several days. She came to my rescue.

This is a holiday. Why go on with the singing, Lise, for the next week or two? Give it a rest.

Oh, said Edward, I thought you had to.

No, I said carefully, feeling my way. I don't think the sea air is very kind to my voice, in any case. It seems awfully constricted down here and I don't want to strain it.

Edward looked for a moment incredulous. I could see his mind worrying my statement like a dog. Then he must have accepted it as valid, for his face cleared.

Well, I'm almost pleased in a way, he said. It will give us more time out. But in another way I'm sorry. I rather wanted to hear you sing. And now I suppose you won't. I don't mean exercises, of course, I meant songs.

Mrs. Yeo supported Edward. I was flattered. My self-esteem rose easily, and my embryonic artistic self swelled and assumed proportions it was far from having any right to. Now I would show them the kind of person they had in the house. I told myself that this was what I had been waiting for. I must, I was certain, have subconsciously resented their lack of interest and their acceptance of me in the household as though I were still the same girl as I was when I left them. I felt appreciated. I even sensed growing up round me like an aura those attributes of mystery and magic with which the public invests the artist. I did not realise that I was spinning it out of myself like a web.

I went out with Edward for the rest of the day and was perfectly happy. I think also that I must have been well-nigh intolerable. I talked nearly all the time. I told him as much as I could of the life I led in London, of the parties and the dinners, and the talk and the drinking. At one point Edward asked with interest:

fi Who pays for all this?

twOh, my mother, I answered without thinking.

And for this Felix Harradine too?

I stumbled over the question as though over a stone in my path. I had hardly realised what I had told him. Had I spoken much of Felix, then? Apparently I had. Edward repeated his question. We were walking slowly over Morton Heath. He was hitting the side of his shoe with his walking-stick and a little shower of yellow sand spurted over it at each tap. The heather was dry and brown and the hot burnt-almond smell of the gorse enveloped us.

Felix is a genius, I said drowsily, my mind dwelling lovingly upon the name. I don't think he has much money. He doesn't *earn* any, if that's what you mean.

Your mother supports him, in fact?

Well, why not? Wouldn't you be proud to think you'd supported a—a Schubert or a Mozart?

If I was sure he *was* a Schubert or a Mozart.

You wouldn't be able to tell, I said angrily. And you are so afraid you might be taken in by a charlatan that you think everyone else must be running the same risk.

I don't see why charlatans should attach themselves to me more than to others, objected Edward, with maddening calm. Human nature being what it is, there is always a risk in supporting specimens of it.

You're implying that my mother has been taken in?

I'm implying nothing of the sort. I only wonder what proofs she has that this man is a—a second Schubert.

I don't know that he's that, exactly, I said sulkily, losing ground.

But Edward took no advantage of it.

At any rate your mother thinks highly enough of his music to support him.

She's given him a wonderful chance. And, in a way, it was a kind of legacy from my father. (A stray remark had grown wings in my brain). He heard Felix's work and would have helped him if he had lived, so my mother thinks it a—a sacred charge.

I see, said Edward humbly, and changed the subject.

I was miserable. Something in me was repelled by my own words. I wanted to enjoy the day, to enjoy Edward's company, and it seemed almost as if I were two people and that one kept jostling the other out of the road, seizing Edward by the arm, buttonholing him and insisting that he give her all his attention, while the other self trailed a little way behind, as the third member of a trio is bound to do on a narrow moorland path, stumbling along over the loose sandy surface, and every now and again calling out:

Edward, do wait for me! I've found something I want to show you.

Then his face would light up, and he would stop. Together we would examine some plant I had spotted, for Edward was an ardent collector. I never found him anything he had not already got, but he liked to see the plants growing and never minded that they were worthless to him. Once it was an adder which lay asleep in the sand at our feet, and glided away with a swift, running movement when we took a step nearer him. But then that other woman would hurry him on, and again I would find myself in the rear, and alone. Edward would look back at me over his shoulder from time to time, would smile a rather hopeless smile, would even open his mouth to speak to me, and nearly every time the stranger beside him would demand his attention, and he would be obliged to listen to her, often looking puzzled, even amazed.

That night, I made an effort to understand myself, to reconcile the two people who were growing up within me, fighting for mastery. Perhaps fighting is too strong a word, for one was only too content to be the shadow of the other, and her protests were of the feeblest. Yet the fact that I was aware of them both was a significant step in my development. It was, of course, the London musician who took the lead, and my Lodmouth self who followed meekly after. As long as this was so—and it never occurred to me that it could be otherwise—it was impossible for me to find any real

happiness at Folliotts. Dissatisfied with myself and my thoughts, I fell asleep at last and awoke almost dreading the day.

The time passed uneasily. Tuesday was a pleasanter day, simply because, having exhausted myself on Monday, I was less disagreeable and Edward more contented. In the evening he again mentioned my singing and asked me when I would sing to them. At the moment he asked me, I happened to be thinking about Felix. I was wondering whether he had got my letter and feeling fairly certain he would not have done. I had conjured up in my mind an affecting picture of Felix going into the post office at Lucerne, asking for my letter, and coming away disappointed. I was suffering a delicious pang on poor Felix's behalf, when Edward's voice suddenly cut into my meditations, with the request that I should sing, and before I could stop myself I answered, speaking straight from the heart, the door of which was at that moment wide open:

Oh, I couldn't, Edward. I couldn't sing to you at all. Please don't ask me to.

There was an astonished silence. Mrs. Yeo looked curiously at me, but didn't speak. Old Mr. Yeo, however, cried:

Why, Lise, you've been telling us singing is your life work and I don't know what.

Yes, but that's different from singing in public now, interrupted Edward quickly.

Good Lord! said Mr. Yeo. Lise will have to sing in public, to a bigger public than us, won't she?

Edward looked at me uncertainly.

You will, you know, he said, smiling. He had joined the family circle again.

But I'm not ready, I muttered.

We're not critical, said Mr. Yeo, kindly.

I don't think you'd like it much if I did, I went on stubbornly. I'm out of practice.

What? After a fortnight? said Edward incredulously.

I felt he had deserted me, gone over to the enemy, and I hated him at that moment. I attempted to shore up my defences.

Who's to accompany me? I said. I can't accompany myself. I thought I had checked them there. They were merciless. I could not have believed it of the gentle Edward.

Weren't you thinking of asking Dolly Emscott in, Edward? asked Mr. Yeo. And Edward replied that he had in fact already mentioned it to her.

Yet, were they really so cruel? Had I been, as most young singers are, eager to sing and display my powers, I might well have found the Yeos lukewarm. It was impossible for us to understand each other. Mrs. Yeo perhaps understood better than the other two, for she said, Let's leave it for the time being. You're going to be here some time yet.

About a week later, some friends of the Yeos came in to lunch. I had had a letter from my mother that morning and my bohemian self had received such a reinforcement that I was able to meet the Yeos' friends as though I were already an established singer. When they heard whose daughter I was, they were impressed. I talked to them a great deal.

Who are you studying with? they asked, intelligently.

At the moment, no one, I replied with airy candour. My mother is going over to Germany soon to make new arrangements for me. She wasn't satisfied with any of the teachers she could find in London.

I suppose we do rather lag behind the Continent in that respect, someone suggested idly.

It's the lack of tradition, I explained. On the Continent the tradition goes on unbroken from great singers like Porpora. The continental singers have generations of experience behind them.

A tall, fair man, who had been sitting rather silently during this conversation, suddenly got up and walked over to the piano. He played softly the opening bars of *Heidenröslein*.

He turned to me, and said, pleasantly, meeting me on what he presumed was my own level, Will you sing for us?

It would be such a delight to hear you, and such an honour to accompany your father's daughter.

I stood up. I felt my breath hardening in my chest as though turning to stone. I tried to meet Edward's eye, but his head was turned away as though embarrassed.

It's—it's too low, I said. I'm a high soprano. I can't sing it too low.

I can transpose it, said the fair gentleman, courteously. What key would you like it in?

Now it may seem strange to those who think of singers as musicians, when I say that I had very little technical knowledge of music. This was far more common then than it is today, when musicianship is valued almost more than the voice. When I was training, musicianship was something which came second to the instrument which had to be trained. Possibly this was a reason why so many singers' repertoires were so small. They dared not stray out of the narrow paths in which they had been taught. To do my mother justice, she was determined that I should be both a good musician as well as a good singer, though this was not from any conviction on the subject, but merely because my father had been so and she saw no reason why she should not buy for me all that my father had. I had not, however, progressed very far with my studies at this time, nor did I find that the technical side of music interested me very much. When the fair gentleman took his hands from the piano and asked me what key I would like to sing *Heidenröslein* in, I was panic-stricken. I had no idea what key he had originally played. There was a silence in the room. Edward's cheek, what I could see of it, looked red and I hated him for his embarrassment. I could not even recall the range of the song. Yet, remembering my mother's letter, I spoke at last.

It doesn't matter, I said. Play it in that key—the one you were in. It will do.

The fair gentleman looked puzzled. One of the lady guests smiled encouragingly, I glared at her in a fury and omitted to take a preparatory breath till it was too late. I broke the

first phrase lamentably, right in the middle of the word *steh'n*. The little quaver passages were uneven and breathy. At the top note, where a pause is marked, I had no support left, and the note faded out into a mere consonant, like a wisp of cloud disappearing into the blue sky. In the second verse I recovered a little and, putting on the pressure, kept the upward phrase going. .

*Röslein, Röslein, Röslein roth*, I squeaked, my voice ending in a most unlovely squeezed note.

I can't remember the words of the last verse, I said abruptly.

Nothing can convey my cruel sense of humiliation. I did not perceive that those around me were suffering too. If only I had fled the room, their exacerbated feelings could have found some relief. They could have excused, explained and sympathised with my failure. But I remained standing stubbornly by the piano, unable to speak for the trembling of my lips, incapable of making an exit. This reduced the entire company to a silence, in which the brain of each person buzzed like a frenzied bee in a bottle, trying to find suitable words. Again it was Mrs. Yeo who spoke, a simple yet pregnant question, for it contained within it like a cordial the all-powerful restorative of my father's name. I drank it in and found myself able to answer.

Did your father ever sing small, simple songs like that, *Lise*, or was it always grand opera?

No, I answered, breathing more easily. He sang Schubert. He sang that song.

You often heard him sing, I suppose? asked one of the visitors with relief.

No, no, I hardly knew him.

The fair young man at the piano stood up. To think, he said, that I shall be able to tell my friends that I accompanied Reinhart's daughter.

How curious it is to note how, in the course of time, the sediment of so many pangs and miseries which once boiled and seethed in our breasts sinks to the bottom of an experi-

ence leaving the water clear, and one sees, perhaps years afterwards, significances which the muddied water prevented one from seeing at the time. The fair young man, for instance, was not the artful fellow I thought him, trying to catch me out with his keys and his questions. He was a brash young music student, only anxious to gain, at one remove, an acquaintanceship with a famous singer. As for me, I made my exit from the room as best as I could and retired to my bedroom to weep for reasons I could not explain to myself. By the second post came a letter from Felix. Mrs. Yeo brought it up.

There's a letter from Switzerland for you, she said.

I was so certain that it could only be another from my mother (who thought nothing of writing two letters where one would do) that I did not hold out my hand for it very readily. Then I saw the handwriting.

And, Lise, Mrs. Yeo was saying, Edward has asked me to tell you—he's thinking of taking a boat out this evening, if you'd like to go. I thought we might have supper a little earlier.

How grateful I should have been to Edward two minutes before, but now my gratitude was all to Felix, as though this letter had been written and delivered to me by some faery post expressly to comfort my distress. And I only answered with the most perfunctory thanks that I'd see what I felt like after supper. I was, I said, rather tired. Mrs. Yeo went away and I held my letter to my face and felt against my overheated skin the cool surface of the paper.

Oh, Felix, Felix, I sobbed. How wonderful of you to write! You've saved my life. I couldn't have borne it if you hadn't written.

As I sat on the edge of my bed, clutching the sheet of note-paper, I laid my other hand outstretched on the counterpane, palm upwards, as though inviting him to take it, and in my imagination, distraught and fevered as it was with emotions as contradictory as humiliation and hope, despair and gratitude, I really thought his hand closed over mine and

for a moment I sat quite still, savouring the exquisite comfort of that sensation and holding my breath while my heart pounded in the hot, silent room. Then I came to my senses again, and looked at the letter.

Dear Lise, I read. About a fortnight ago I wrote to you, with that song of mine, and already it seems that years are between us. I have not heard from you, but of course you may have written to the London Poste Restante, or alternatively you may be too wrapped up in your Lodmouth life, as I am in this life here. But there is one good thing about it, it gives an opportunity for a delicious secret correspondence, and that is delightful to me, and I hope to you. I will tell you something strange about me—I hate anything to be at too close quarters to me. I think I am, constitutionally, long-sighted, as I believe I am visually. Do you understand this? I find it difficult to focus my eyes on things near to me. I like to rest my eyes on the horizon. I dislike having people too close to me. That is why I find the life here almost—oppressive. There is a flavour of that terrible internment camp, when the worst privation was loss of solitude. Here I have regular hours, enforced walks, publicity (your mother was quick to make her name known and with it mine) and—but the obligations I am under towards her make it very despicable that I should criticise her.

My mind is full of plans, hopes, schemes for my independence—yet I can only confess a tenth part of my feeling to you. I should make a poor Catholic, for I should always withhold the essential truth, even if it damned me. Write to me, Lise. You could get a letter to me by the end of the week if you wrote at once. Soon we move to Bavaria. What are you really like? You have receded into the distance and become a phantasm to me. Felix. P.S. Your letter has just come. Thank you for it, dear Lise. We leave on Saturday.

He added the Bavarian address.

The gong went for supper before I had finished my reading and re-reading of this letter. I went downstairs. Edward asked me if I was coming out with him and I said I was busy. I had an important letter to write. Like Felix, I was becoming long-sighted. I never noticed Edward's face.

Darling Felix, I wrote. Darling Felix. Yes, just over a fortnight ago you sent me that song. And I wrote to Ebury Street Post Office. I can't repeat what I said in that letter. Perhaps it's as well, or you would get swollen-headed. You don't ask me what I think of the song. Aren't you interested in it any more? Perhaps not. I suppose when you have composed a thing, it goes out of you and no longer seems a part of you any more. Instead, it's a part of me [I thought this very original and subtle]. Write me another song, Felix, one that brings Bavaria to me. Wouldn't it be marvellous if your songs made us both famous? You as composer and me as singer? And then, I remember today and I wonder if I ever *shall* be singer. Oh, Felix, it's been a terrible day. But I could never tell you about it. I can only say this, that your letter saved me. I seemed to feel you in the room with me. I think letters make you see people more clearly. I can see you now, anyway, and I hope that when you read this you will see me, and I shan't be a dream any more. And yet perhaps it would be better if I was. You might think me awfully silly and childish. I can't write any more tonight, and it may be difficult tomorrow. Edward is on holiday, which is a bore. I like my solitude too, so you and I are in the same boat. I'll post this to you tonight so that it gets to you before you leave Lucerne.

I did not know how to end this effusion. At last, after long thought, I wrote:

Write again soon to your loving

LISE.

I sealed it up and ran out of the house to catch the bus into Lodmouth, for I feared that unless I caught the last post at the G.P.O. in the town the letter would be delayed and might not reach Felix before the week-end. I ran down the road in a fever, and caught the rickety little bus which only ran in the summer months as a concession to the rising generation of young men and maidens who sought the pleasures of Lodmouth of an evening. It was packed now with country people, red-faced and sweating into cotton frocks and soft shirts. Like them, I thought that life existed only in towns. Like them, my thoughts moved constantly away from the country, away from my roots and the roots of all my kind, and, like them, I thought some special virtue resided in crowded pavements. Different and superior, I suppose, I imagined myself, jammed up against some flannel-clad swain, but my spirit was more cheaply clad than theirs and carried in a more fruitless, idiotic direction.

That night, when all the household were in bed, I went to my window and leaned out. I knew—had I not carefully observed the setting sun that evening?—exactly where the points of the compass lay and that my room, which was at the side of the house, faced south-east. It could not have been placed more fortunately for me. In fact, I cannot think what I should have done if it had faced south-west instead, or, worse still, north-west, the very antipodes of my desire. I should have been deprived of one of my most enjoyable outlets of emotion and one well suited to warm August nights.

South-east lay the Channel, and on the other side of it the coast of France. My imagination soared like a gull over the water which I could see from my window, dark and smooth, stretching away to the faint horizon beyond the black shoulder of the cliffs. Then it flew straight over sleeping villages and cities, unimagined and formless, but intelligibly there below me: it crossed the silver coil of the Rhine, rose into mountains, skimmed over star-reflecting lakes and black forest masses, till it came to rest over the small Swiss hotel

where I pictured Felix, alone, perhaps awake as I was, perhaps, as I was, looking out over a stretch of water as still as glass under the moon, and encrusted with the reflection of a thousand stars. Looking out over that water, into that sky, I experienced for the first time that commonplace of lovers, the sense of time suspended, and space contracted, which brings those far apart into a synthetic unity. Underneath the vastness of that sky, where a hundred million miles of space between two stars would be a dangerous intimacy, how infinitesimal the distance that divided us. In comparison, less than the thickness of a grass blade lay between our straining cheeks. And in the tremendous journey of a planet through these patterned heavens, a journey of a whole twelvemonth, how trivial the span of weeks before we should see each other again. Thus comforted, I left the window, and went to bed, to fall asleep on a high tide of hopeful emotion, and to rise with the ebbing of this tide the next morning.

I found the days difficult to bear. Had I been indifferent to Edward, it would not have been of so much distress to me that I could not be the companion he wanted. But I loved Edward deeply, though I would never have used the word love in connection with him. I was consumed with a compound of remorse and irritation, happiness and discontent, so that I felt myself compelled to fall in with his holiday plans, and then only too liable to spoil them by my incapacity for full enjoyment. I wanted sometimes to be alone, but inevitably we were together, on walks, on boating expeditions, on strolls over the cliffs and along the beach. At any moment I had the power to call to my side the spirit of Felix and to discourse eloquently to this emanation. But I could not summon it when Edward was there. I longed for the night, when I could lean out into the delicious warm air, and feel on my face the wind of the Swiss mountains.

The end of the week came, and on Sunday the Yeo family went to eight o'clock Communion service. I did not accompany them, as I had done when I lived with them. My new

life had no place for religious observance in it. I got up, however, and as soon as they left the house I walked quickly out, over the short cut across the marshes to the sea. I walked along the top of the sea wall, away from the town towards the empty beaches under the cliffs. When I reached the end of the wall, I stood quite still, and watched the sun break through the early clouds, and the mist roll away from the downs in front of me. The sun had found a hole in the cloak of vapour some time before and there was a vivid yellow stain on the sea's face, a long way out towards the horizon. At last the sun itself could be seen, clear cut and round, even silver in colour, behind the lingering veil of mist. Then, as I watched, it gradually expanded, its warmth on my skin increased, its brightness intensified till at last it burst into a full blaze of light, and I walked on, feeling at my heart an extraordinary exaltation. My right hand at my side no longer felt empty. I was conscious of companionship. The shore, with the tide full out and the long lines of timber groynes and stone walls, had a grace, a freshness and beauty, I had never seen before. Felix! I cried out aloud, and repeated his name. Almost drunk with happiness, I ran along the virgin sands till I was tired out.

Towards the end of Edward's holiday—it lasted three weeks—I quarrelled with him bitterly. No further mention had been made of my singing to the family for several days after the fiasco in front of the Yeos' guests. And then Mr. Yeo raised the matter one day at dinner.

I saw Dolly Emscott today, he said. She came in about that brooch, Edward. You remember? The one we've been repairing for her. She had heard Reinhart's daughter was staying with us and was very anxious to come in and meet Lise.

I did not quite know what to say, for Mr. Yeo had mentioned this woman now as an ordinary acquaintance, not as a potential accompanist for me. Was it still intended that I should sing with her? I did not know. Then, stupidly, I raised the matter myself.

Wasn't she the person who was going to accompany me?

I asked, with that inner perversity which sometimes makes havoc with our gestures and speech.

Why, yes, said Edward. If you're still willing to sing to us.

Edward saw his mistake even as the words came out of his mouth, but it was too late. He had the sense not to apologise and if I had had equal sense I should never have alluded to the matter. As it was, I caught up the word still, and instead of answering Edward's question, I said, trembling with anger and humiliation:

Why should I not still be willing to sing for you?

Edward is the kind of man who rarely speaks unadvisedly. This is not to say that he does not speak from the heart, that he is insincere, prevaricating or calculating. He is not; he can speak generously, even extravagantly, but he rarely makes a criticism or an adverse judgment without pausing to consider it, for his nature is gentle and courteous and he cannot endure to give others pain. Once his opinion is formed he is perfectly honest in delivering it if it is asked for, however adverse it may be, but even so his criticism is constructive, as though it were a faulty watch he were repairing. It has to be a very poor specimen indeed for him to declare that it is past all mending. So now he considered my question for a moment and then answered quite deliberately.

You were not happy singing a few days ago. In fact, you didn't sing well, at your best.

I'm sorry I disappointed you.

I don't think I was disappointed. I am not a musician and I don't know quite what standard to expect.

I sang very badly.

Do you know why? That seems to me the only thing that matters.

I nearly said, I'm out of practice, but something stopped me—perhaps the probity of Edward's receptive mind which, I feared, would repel such an answer. Instead, almost tearfully, I complained:

You expect too much of me. I am not ready to sing to an audience yet.

But you sing to your mother's friends in London. They must be far more critical, seeing that they are all musicians.

I could not now deny this, for it was the result of my own boastful and foolish words. I had never in so many words said that I had sung to my mother's friends, but I made such veiled hints as gave the Yeos reason enough to think so.

I am wondering, Edward went on, whether you will ever enjoy singing to an audience. Will you?

Of course! I cried.

Edward pursued the theme relentlessly, as though he were trying to discover a tiny fault in my mechanism.

But there's something called artistic temperament. Have you got it?

(But every watch needs to be wound carefully, he might have said. Do you wind yours?)

Yes, yes, I almost shouted.

I'm not talking about your voice, you know. I'm not competent to judge that.

You're not competent to judge temperament either, Edward, I retorted. At last I could move to the attack.

Why not? he parried.

Because you've never moved among people who have it.

It might make it easier for me to judge it. Your friend Felix someone-or-other, it seemed to me he had it. Whereas your mother, no, I should say not.

That just shows how hopeless it is for you to judge, I cried in confused anger. You know nothing about my mother.

I could not marshal my thoughts. I was more conscious of an unreasoning hatred of Edward than of the actual basis of our quarrel. If Edward was ignorant about artistic temperament, so was I, for it was little more than a piece of jargon to me. I heard the phrase used to justify some extraordinary behaviour and to excuse some very commonplace sins. I think I regarded it as a kind of passport, issued to anyone possessed of some artistic equipment like a good voice, or an ability to play an instrument, and with this passport I imagined that they had certain rights and privileges not

accorded to ordinary men and women, and I thought also that they exercised these rights—the right to abandon ordinary moral laws and sanctions, in particular—because such behaviour was in some way necessary for the fostering of their peculiar genius. I did not see temperament as a mental and emotional attitude which enables a performer to handle his particular talent—a good voice, an agile finger—in such a way as to re-create the written page into sound and to re-create it for a specific audience, as though it were performed for the first time. I did not perceive that temperament is a vehicle on which the composer rides out from the silence of the printed page into the soundful air.

Don't be angry with me, I heard Edward saying. I am interested. That's all. The make-up of an artist is as fascinating to me as the works of a watch.

I'm not a watch to be pulled to bits, I said sulkily. Leave me alone, Edward.

All right, he said good-humouredly, and added suddenly, Let's go to the Island!

This was a characteristic of Edward's, which I later learned was evident as much in his work as in his social relations. He hated to worry out a problem which showed no immediate signs of solution. He disliked facing too long an impasse or a technical difficulty. It was not that he was a mental coward, for he returned to his problem again and again and was far more tenacious than most people in unravelling a difficulty. But he believed that to worry over any one problem for too long hardened it and gave it a resistance to solution which exhausted the spirit. When I later came to see him actually at work, I realised how this was applied to such a meticulous task as watch-repairing. He would usually have several, at least three or four, jobs in hand at the same time and he would work steadily at one for some time, and then lay it down when he found he had exhausted his capacity to cope with the problems it presented. He would then work at another, and when he returned to the first would often find himself able to perform (without difficulty) some intricate

piece of manipulation which had hitherto been eluding his skill. Even in our games, as children, Edward would never flog an idea, but liked to pass rapidly from one game to another. He could abandon a pure fantasy game, such as shipwrecked sailors, when he had exhausted upon it all his immediate ideas, and, before it became boring or repetitive, would disappear to hunt for beetles. Having sated his desire for beetles, he could return to his make-believe at the very point where he had left it, open at the very sentence which had last been spoken. So methodical a mind could have been repulsive, had it not been enlivened with the utmost good humour, tolerance and kindness, and illuminated with flashes of insight and imagination. Moreover, such a characteristic as I have described could well be the expression of a shallow and dilettante mind, if the variableness of its interests had been too widely dispersed. But it was not so. Edward's abandonment, whether of a watch or a game, was due not to flagging interest or a restless longing for variety, but to a calculated method of extracting the maximum energy from himself and enjoyment from his subject.

I acquiesced, rather unwillingly, in his suggestion that we should go to the Island. I had not been there for some years. As a child of fourteen and fifteen I had secretly been afraid of its savage, rocky aspect, which brought the primitive in close proximity with the civilised. When Edward and his mother had taken me there, I had been obliged to pretend to enjoy what in fact only terrified me. Now the terror had gone and left only an ashamed dislike. The Island was desolate, swept by tremendous winds and battered by the Atlantic rollers, but it was not empty of people. There were roads and houses on it, and one was rarely out of sight of human habitation, so I had no need to feel such fears. The sea around it was often in its cruellest mood. The breakers tore at the solid rock foundations, and fell back over the smooth pebbles of the western beaches with a grinding sound like tremendous jaws monotonously working. More often than not some wreck lay exposed on that beach, slowly

breaking up in the heavy seas. On the eastward side, the mood was different. The current raced past the Point leaving the eastern face of the Island in comparative calm, while it pursued a white-combed path along the surface of the water, as though some giant hand were raking the sea past the Island towards the distant cliff-prowed land on the far side of the bay.

Edward and his brother Clement, before the latter joined up, would spend hours watching the ships from the Point, and I counted myself fortunate when I was not asked to accompany them. When Clement enlisted, we did not go there any more. Now Edward wanted to visit it again, and I wondered secretly if it was in part a tribute to his brother's memory, this expedition. It did not make me any easier in mind to think that it was so.

We crossed over to the Island by the causeway in the local train. Edward seemed very remote. I had time to think, as I sat in my corner seat, looking out on the vast beach of pebbles which linked the Island with the mainland, and to wish that Edward were a companion for whom I had some feeling. I meant, of course, some sort of the feeling I had for Felix. I did not take count of any other. I might have been alone, I told myself miserably. To see all this with Felix—for now I had become aware for the first time of the raising of the emotional temperature induced by movement, even on a short journey. By oneself it is mere interlude between one point and another, but with an emotionally attuned companion any journey becomes indissolubly bound up in the general progress of one's love, which is in itself a journey. Of Edward's thoughts I had no conception.

When we climbed over the rocks at the Point and Edward took my hand to steady me, I thought nothing of the fact that he went on holding it after we sat down. I felt nothing but my own sense of grievance that Felix was not with me. The Point thrust right out into the sea. To the west, in the still brilliant sunshine (it was late afternoon) the green water heaved slowly and majestically in vast solid masses. West

Bay was calm, but under its glassy swell heaved a tremendous tension which pulled the mass of water over as it reached the cliff wall of the Island in a seething broth of foam, as though some huge sleeper, turning in his sleep, threw back his monstrous sheets. Ahead of us, where the swell was cut by the Point, the water was broken into a million tiny, hurrying wavelets, and each one caught the long slanting rays of sunshine so that we looked upon a sea as radiant as a green cloak covered with sequins.

I forgot how wonderful it was here, at the Point, said Edward. On the edge of England. This is the place I ought to come to once a week to act as a corrective to my work.

Why? I asked politely.

To give me a sense of space after looking for days upon nothing larger than the inside of a watch.

I did not feel sufficient interest to say anything more. Grudgingly I had to admit to myself that the spot excited me. I felt as if I had within my breast a hollow space and that within it the sob and roar of the waves was reverberating as if in an empty hall. Once conscious of this feeling, I pinned it down in my mind, to tell Felix in my next letter, and as the thought twisted my heart with longing for his actual presence, I became conscious that Edward was still holding my hand, and I was annoyed to find that I could not unobtrusively withdraw mine.

Let go, Edward, I said rather heartily. I want to blow my nose.

He relinquished it and then I found that I had no handkerchief. Worse, although I had had till that moment no need of one, the wind was beginning to make my nose run abominably. Edward produced one.

Will you borrow mine? he said.

I might have known it would be scrupulously clean, still in its folds. I could hardly refuse it, so I took it and blew my nose violently upon its virgin surface.

You're not feeling cold? he asked solicitously, and added, Lise, you look like your old self, sitting on this rock, blowing

your nose on my handkerchief, your hair on end in the wind and your face so still, staring out to sea.

What a picture of myself! I blushed to hear it. Was that really how I appeared to Edward? And if to him, then, I supposed, to others. I said I was sorry I made such an unfortunate commonplace, schoolgirlish picture, adding sarcastically that it was a relief to me that he had not got a camera.

Oh, but I wish I had, he answered seriously. You don't know how—he hesitated—how charming you look to me.

The wind blew a tremendous buffet in my face, and slapped the waves below so that a shower of spray rose high in the air, iridescent, and through it I could see a clear rainbow.

Oh look, Edward! I cried, surprised out of myself. Look, Edward. How beautiful!

But it had gone with the spray. He saw only the water splashed on the stones, and sucked back into the waves. I suppose he was thinking of Clement, for he said suddenly:

Do you remember how I wanted to go into the Army?

Well, no, I don't. Why didn't you? I should have thought you would find it more interesting than watch-repairing.

I haven't an air of authority.

You mean you can't order people about?

Not only can't, don't want to.

I thought you learned that when you were a prefect at your public school.

I was a bad prefect.

Well, you needn't have aimed very high. You could have risen just to a Captain or something.

Ah no, that wouldn't satisfy my ambition. (Had Edward ambition, then?) And I should need authority, anyway, even as a Captain. I couldn't have done it, you know, Lise. I can't give an order to a gardener.

Well, does it matter?

It would have mattered if I had gone into the Army. It was a good thing I found out in time.

Found out? It wasn't your father that stopped you, then?

Oh, Lord, no. I think Father rather liked the idea. You see, Clement would have gone into the business. I don't think it was ever intended that I should do so, and it would have settled the problem of my future.

I said nothing. Edward took a deep breath and went on: Shall I tell you how I found out?

Oh, yes, Edward, of course. Do.

I was a little puzzled at all this, for Edward was not a person who talked about himself much.

It was at a scout meeting.

Oh, really, Edward, don't be ridiculous. I don't want to hear about a lot of little boys running about with bare knees, and making signals.

There's more to scouting than that, said Edward reproachfully. But let that pass. I was a terribly good scout. My arm was covered with badges. I was clever with my hands, and neat. I could do things like knots more easily than other boys, so I got all the badges in record time. Mr. Gammins, the scoutmaster, was very pleased with me.

Edward, why are you telling me all this?

You'll see in a minute, Lise. I'm not enjoying it, really. It seems faintly ridiculous now, only let me go on. The ridiculous, humiliating and shameful episodes in one's life, are, I think, more influential than the successes. Anyway, Mr. Gammins made me a patrol leader. I managed that all right up to a point.

Oh, Edward, I hate this sort of reminiscence. Do forget it.

Edward was strangely impervious to my entreaties.

One day, he went on doggedly, one day when I got to the scout hut, Gammins wasn't there. He'd sent a note by one of the boys who lived up his end of the town—Billy Baker was the boy's name.

Does it matter what his name was?

Not particularly. It's all part of the memory, though. The note said Gammins was ill and would I take the meeting? I couldn't, you know, Lise. I just didn't know what to do with them. And it wasn't so much that I tried to exert authority

and failed—no one cheeked me, or anything. The meeting was quite quiet and orderly, but it just did nothing. A few youngsters fooled about a bit, but I was itching to get on with some practical work for one of my badges and I just couldn't see why they weren't too. I haven't the temperament that can organise other people, so I just let them be bored.

I knew what Edward was leading up to, even before the word temperament emerged from the story. My mind set up an opposition as stubborn as the rocks which the sea was beating. Like Edward, the sea was unable to organise anything, but it had a tenacious strength which ground relentlessly against the objects in its path.

What a stupid story, Edward. Thank Heaven you've grown out of scouting.

I am twenty-two, Lise. My scouting days are over. But you see, they have a significance for me. I know that I should be passionately interested<sup>d</sup> in the mechanical workings of a tank, but I could hardly be a mechanic. My class demands that I should be an officer, and that means ordering others to do what I would rather do myself.

You'd have been trained to do it. You wouldn't have found it difficult.

Do you think that? There's more to singing, isn't there, than just having one's voice trained?

The warning signal. I would not respond. I tried to deflect the conversation.

Oh, let's leave singing out of it. The two things are quite different. You can't compare an officer with an opera singer.

Why not?

Unable to answer the question reasonably, I flew into a passion. I was holding a small stone in my hand. Edward's hand was spread out, palm downwards, on the ground beside me. I hit it with all my force. Edward did not say a word for a minute or two. He nursed his hand inside his coat and went on speaking in a curiously remote voice.

I hadn't the temperament for an officer. Have you ever asked yourself, Lise, whether you have the temperament for a singer?

Why had I hit Edward? I think it was to give myself and him an immediate crisis to solve. To distract myself from the crisis of choice which he was forcing upon me. I was frightened of Edward, as frightened as if I had thrown the stone into the sea and it had rebounded instead of sinking into the water. The gem-like glitter of the sunlit waves, the perpetual and inescapable wind that whined through the telegraph wires at our backs and scuffed the water into points and knife-edged wavelets, the Point itself, jutting out into the sea, the lighthouse rearing skyward, all asserted to the immediate scene their inexorability. I alone was fluid, indecisive, unformed, malleable, capable only of a futile and ineffective gesture.

Could I have given an answer to Edward's question, an adequate answer—an answer, that is, as definite and implicit with inner conviction as a rock to a wave, as a cliff to the wind, there would have been no antagonism and no retreat. But I had no conviction. I could not reply except by hatred and withdrawal.

I won't answer you, Edward. I won't. I hate you and your interference. Let me alone. What right have you to interfere in my life?

I must have spoken words something like these. I don't remember the words now, only the tears that sprang from my eyes and the intolerable strain on my facial muscles to prevent them contorting into the ugly grotesque of weeping. Edward put his arm round me. Looking down and away from him, I saw his hand on my shoulder, the back of it already swollen and turning black, and almost beside myself, I flung it aside and jumped to my feet. I did not stop to see whether Edward followed. I ran blindly away from him up the stony track from the Point to the coastguard cottages. A woman was taking in her washing. Gratified, she unpegged the bleached sheets and the wind caught them and wrapped

them round her as she reached up her arms. She laughed at her predicament. Then she saw my face and stared, and it was as if a rosy sun had been extinguished in a white cloud. The laughing woman, the billowing sheets, the sparkling sea, and Edward's comforting hand, I had stamped upon them all the stigmata of my hate and I ran on without stopping, along the lane that led over the Island to the nearest village. I took the bus home by myself. Edward did not overtake me, nor in fact did he come in till quite late in the evening.

I tried to write to Felix, but I found that I could not. There was nothing I could tell him of this conversation or of Edward. Nor could I do as I had done in previous letters, describe at length some scene or experience which I wanted him to share. He seemed suddenly very remote from me, hundreds of miles away in physical fact and more than that spiritually. Instead, I wrote to my mother and gave her a long account of how bored I was at Lodmouth and how much I was longing to get back to my singing. I added a P.S.

I think I may even go back to London before you.

Having written the words I felt a sudden relief. At last I had taken an independent decision. It is a fact that there are occasions when, without any known exertion of the will or choice, one writes oneself into a course of action which seems utterly unpremeditated, and I can only suppose that the deeper recesses of one's mind have taken the decision for one. I felt an accession of dignity and strength. I came down to dinner and looked on Edward's bandaged hand calmly, with no emotion. After dinner I told Mrs. Yeo that I was becoming worried about my voice, and thought I ought to go back to London.

But, my dear, she said, why don't you practise? You have hardly done a thing since you have been down here.

I know I haven't, I admitted. The truth is, I find it difficult, without a teacher to guide me. You see, I added with

becoming humility, I am still very much a beginner. I thought I should be able to get on by myself for a few weeks, but—I can't.

Well, you know best, I suppose, said Mrs. Yeo doubtfully. We shall be very sorry to lose you, you know, Edward's still got a few days of his holiday to run. Couldn't you just stay another week?

No, oh, no, I said hurriedly. No, I couldn't really.

I was so agitated that I longed to go and pack my bag at once.

But I thought you said that you hadn't a teacher, said Mr. Yeo.

Edward had not said a word. He was reading a book, but he looked at me as his father spoke.

I am going to arrange to have lessons with Arevski.

I had hardly formulated the words in my mind. At least I was unconscious of it. I heard myself say them with astonishment and realised their source. Two days before I had seen in *The Times* a small announcement, *The distinguished Russian tenor, Arevski, has declined the Bolshevik Government's offer to return to Russia and become Director of the Moscow Singing Academy and has left France to take up residence in London.* Arevski had been a friend of my father's and once, in those far-off pre-war Pimlico days, I had seen him and even spoken to him. I had read that paragraph, as I say, two days before, and it had worked its passage through my brain like a stowaway unknown to me, to emerge now in this remark to Mrs. Yeo.

But isn't your London house empty? asked Mr. Yeo, who was far more concerned for my health and comfort than my artistic progress.

Oh no, the maids are there. They will look after me. And my mother will be back in a few days, I expect.

She's arranged these lessons, I suppose, while you've been here?

Not exactly. Arevski was a friend of my father's, I went on, without precisely answering Mr. Yeo's question.

When do you feel you must go? asked Mrs. Yeo. Not till the end of the week, surely?

I think I ought to go earlier than that. I—I probably have to see Arevski on Friday and I want to do bit of work first. You could do it here, couldn't you?

Really I can't, Aunt May. There isn't—there isn't the atmosphere.

I think Mrs. Yeo gave me up then. She could not cease to love me, but she ceased to try to understand me. She withdrew from me, not her affection, but her interest. She could not admire a voice she had hardly ever heard or maintain interest in a way of life of which I was such a jejune and unconvincing example. I was aware of her withdrawal in an almost physical sense. It was as though, walking along a crowded street, the people suddenly evaporated, and one walked on alone. The Yeos withdrew and I went upstairs in some discomfort of mind, and as much hurt at my own inability to retain them at my side as by their tacit admission of my alien status. I went to my room and packed, for there seemed no point in staying a day longer.

Next morning I said good-bye to the Yeos and Edward drove me to the station. He hardly spoke at all.

Can you drive all right with that hand? I asked, with a slight effort.

D'you mean, does it hurt me?

I suppose so, yes. Does it hurt you?

It hurts me, but I can use it.

Oh, I'm glad.

Edward's dry manner shrivelled any inclination I might have had to talk. The station was stuffy. It was going to be another blazing day, and I wondered suddenly what Edward would do with it, where he would go.

He called a porter and as we walked behind him towards the waiting train I could not help my curiosity getting the better of me.

What are you going to do today, Edward?

Yet as soon as I said the words I wished them unsaid.

I expect I shall go out, he said, after only a momentary hesitation.

I sat down in my corner seat and spread a magazine which Edward had given me on my knee. I noticed that it was the *Musical Times* and felt a mixture of irritation and remorse.

Don't wait, I said.

I won't if you don't mind, answered Edward. Farewells at stations are rather a bore, don't you think?

He raised his hat and was gone before I could say anything in reply to his uncharacteristic and artificial remark.

The train moved out of the station and into dismal back-streets, but every now and again, through an alley, I could see the livid blue of the bay and glitter of the sun on the still water. The town was left behind. The cliffs near Folliotts came into view, their seaward face deep in shadow, the incandescent white dulled to a deep grey, for the morning sun was behind them. Silhouetted against the clear sky, their shapes were piled up along the coast like folded linen. Something made me lean forward and look back towards the receding town, and just at that moment the train began to cross the marsh and there was a clear view of the western bay, the curve of the esplanade, the long elegant stone pier stretched out over the water like a strip of white tape, the dark mass of the naval fort behind it with the guns flashing in the sun as though they were actually being fired, and beyond, for a moment, I saw the dim shape of the Island, wreathed in a sea mist which concealed its lower slopes and made it appear some fabulous and enchanted land, suspended in mid-air. We reached the hills and the train entered a tunnel. With a sinking heart I turned to Edward's magazine.

I had lunch on the train and arrived at Waterloo during the afternoon. A taxi took me to Bellingham Square. It was quite empty, not merely of human beings, but even of air, it seemed. The houses stood shimmering in the heat, their pale cream stucco as dry and flaky as a sunburned skin. In the garden which ran down the centre of the Square, the laurels were grey with dust and the grass was a dingy brown.

I paid off the driver and stood on the top step of the house, my luggage beside me and a feeling of utter desolation in my heart. I rang the bell somewhat tentatively. No one came to the door. Suppose the maids had never come back? I could not live there alone. I could not go back to Lodmouth. What should I do? Frightened now, I rang the bell again, loudly, and to my relief heard an answering clatter in the basement. A face peered up at me and in a few moments I heard the bolts being drawn.

The maids were not pleased to see me. Rather grudgingly, they carried my bags up to my room and brought me a cup of tea which had not been made with boiling water. They had also forgotten to put out the sugar basin, and I was too tired to demand that one of them should bring it up. I drank my unsweetened tea with sodden tea-leaves floating on top of it, and looked through the few letters which were lying in the drawing-room. I suppose I hoped, irrationally, that there was something for me, but of course there was nothing. Only bills for my mother and a couple of letters for Felix.

The sight of his name on the envelopes fascinated me. I stared at it for a long time, looking from one to the other, wondering who the letters were from, what life Felix had led before I knew him and indeed was leading now. How little I knew of him, little beyond what two or three letters had revealed and how could I tell how much had been laid bare or concealed in them? I did not believe that my mother really understood him. She over-patronised him, I felt sure. Felix was too fine a spirit to be dependent upon patronage, and I thought I detected, in the irritableness he sometimes displayed towards my mother, the chafing of his personality against the bondage he was in. My conception of him was built up from the scraps of conversation which I heard between him and my mother, conversations which often began rather artificially, but ended on a note of tension which I construed as the straining of the leash. There were undertones to these conversations which I found it impossible to comprehend for I had no experience to relate them to. I was

aware of them, and could only find them puzzling and disturbing, or even wounding, for they made me feel acutely my youthfulness and lack of knowledge.

Felix wrote a great many songs and used sometimes to bring them down and play them on our piano. Sometimes the words were in German and I could not understand them. My mother would stand over the piano, and repeat them softly, lingering over the vowels, so that the song seemed to sigh. Even the harsh gutturals of German were so slurred by my mother that the lyrics seemed to float off her lips like smoke. And then Felix would play his setting, and, excluded, I sat and listened and wished I could have a part in what I deemed their artistic communings. Felix was never irritable with her then. Often a curious humility came over him. I felt angrily that it should be my mother who bowed down before this miracle of musical creation, but it was Felix who offered, my mother who accepted. It was as though he wrote his songs for her, and I was torn between jealousy and pride. My feelings were variable and veered from one side to another, for there was so little I could build on in my thoughts. Now, however, I thought less about Felix the man than of the Felix-Lise relationship, a growing secret flower which I contemplated with increasing wonder and curiosity. I took the two letters upstairs into Felix's rooms, and stood there, with them in my hand, looking on the scene where I had had that memorable conversation with him. I don't think I consciously longed for him to be present. I was far from desiring any physical contact with him then, and as for conversation, I should hardly have known what to say to him. No, the relationship that had grown up in our short interchange of letters gave me exactly what I wanted. I thought of this relationship constantly, almost as if it were a third person. Gradually it was beginning to rule my life. Whatever I did was shared inwardly with Felix, so that only together did we form a whole personality. My quarrel with Edward had temporarily thrust this relationship into the background, but now I was away from Lodmouth it re-

asserted its dominion over my mind and heart and I again offered up to it my contemplation and devotion.

I put the letters down on the piano, and left the room without examining it with any curiosity. It frightened me a little. I was not yet ready for material contacts. Once downstairs, however, I found it easy to write to him, as if something had been released in me by this brief contact with his possessions, and I poured out the whole story of my return from Lodmouth and my determination to work hard at my singing now that I was back in London.

It was getting dusk when I finished the letter and a note to my mother also to tell her that I had returned home. I realised that no dinner had been produced for me and rang the bell. A rather sulky maid called Bertha appeared.

What about dinner, Bertha? I asked, as boldly as I could.

There ain't none, she retorted. You never let us know, Miss, as you were coming, so we've got nothing in.

But I arrived this afternoon. Couldn't you have bought something?

You never gave us no orders, Miss, she said, looking spitefully at me.

I felt conscious of a horrible gulf which I was powerless to bridge.

I'll go out to a restaurant, I said. I shan't be late back.

Perhaps you'll take the keys, Miss, said Bertha. I'll leave them in the hall for you. Gertrude and me was thinking of going to bed early if you've no objection.

No, of course not, I said, and went into my bedroom to get my coat.

I walked down the Square, with a curiously light feeling in my head and a slight shakiness about my legs. My new independence frightened me. But I could not now draw back. For the next few days at least I should have to direct my life and, though it alarmed me, I felt a small stirring of exhilaration at the opportunity, for I hoped that Felix would admire me for returning home and taking up my London life of my own volition. I was very confused in my mind between a desire

to attract him as a woman and to awake his admiration as a singer.

When I reached the shops I felt more secure. All were shut now, of course, but there were men still working in the shoe-menders', though they had only an oil lamp and the shop looked very gloomy now that the sun had dropped below the London roof-tops. I knew there was a small restaurant on the corner at the end of the street, and was glad to see a faint orange bar of light lying on the pavement outside it, and to smell the odour of cooking which emanated from the grill in the basement and hung heavily on the warm, still air. When I pushed open the door, the stale atmosphere of a restaurant at the end of the day told me, like the garlic-laden breath of some of my mother's habitués, precisely what had been consumed earlier in the day.

I sat down at a table with a stained and spotted cloth and picked up the menu. The food was cheap, but there seemed to be little choice. My independence was becoming an effort to me. I wished I had waited till the maids had gone to bed and then gone down and foraged in the larder for myself. But this was, I believed, the sort of little eating-house frequented by artists. I bolstered up my increasing distaste for its appearance and smell by telling myself that I was too well looked after for a genuine bohemian. I even formed in my mind the resolve to suggest to my mother that I should live in a room of my own and fend for myself. The arrival of a plateful of unappetising food put an end to my speculations. The risotto I had chosen proved to be a slab of insufficiently-warmed rice over which had been poured a brown gravy containing a few pieces of stringy meat and underdone onion. I was finicky over my food and unaccustomed to badly cooked or unpalatably served meals. I gazed at this mess with repugnance, poked at it with my fork, tasted a morsel and felt all my self-confidence ebbing away from me. I was near to tears and sat there staring at my plate for several minutes, wondering what I should do, and trying to compose myself to prevent the other diners

from seeing my distress. Suddenly I heard a voice saying: Why, Lise Reinhart, what are you doing all on your own here?

I looked up into the rather soft, effeminate face of a young man I had often seen at our house. His name was Erik Barnaby and he was a singer. He had a high, reedy tenor voice which he hoped to persuade my mother to recommend to various influential people who came to her drawing-room. My mother disliked his appearance, which was unprepossessing, but he was too genuinely bohemian for her to cast him adrift. She referred to him (when he was not there) as "my little monster." He was extremely short and fat. I was grateful for his presence tonight, though I did not like him.

My mother's away, I said miserably.

Oh dear, oh dear, said Erik, and sat down beside me. Don't you like the grub?

Not very much.

Pretty filthy, I admit. Though providents like me have to eat it—or nothing. As often as not the latter.

I looked at him with a lack-lustre eye. He seemed very plump on it, though it was, certainly, not the firm flesh of good health, but a rather pale, whitish, flabby furnishing over small effeminate bones which showed at wrist and fingers.

There are maids surely at No. 12? he said, raising expressive eyebrows. Ah, no, now I have it. (He held up a small hand with a cheap ring on the centre finger). I have it. It is the maids' half day. I believe maids have half days in these degenerate times. In my father's day they worked without respite from five-thirty in the morning till ten at night, and their only time off was for meals and for church on Sundays. Now they have half days and do not go to church. *O tempora! O mores!*

His manner was affected, yet I was so glad to have a friendly human being talk to me that I laughed at his remark.

But, my dear child, he went on, what are you going to eat? I don't recommend your struggling any longer with that. A most disagreeable dish, I think. I always avoid it. If ever

you have occasion to come here again choose the fish. It is really the only thing that is eatable, and that is because they import it ready cooked from the fried fish shop down the street. It is, alas, slightly dearer than the *risotto* or the shepherds' pie. I have it only on Friday. I am a Catholic, of course.

He cocked an enquiring eye on me as he said this, to see what effect it would have on me, but religion meant nothing to me then and I really should not have cared if he had said he was a Mormon.

I can't eat it, I confessed. I really am rather hungry.

Waiter! called Erik in his high, affected voice, and rapped authoritatively on the table. The waiter shuffled up to the table. His feet were bad and he wore pumps which were slit at the sides to ease his bunions.

Take this away, Harry, said Erik. Dreadful stuff. Bring the lady some fish, and for me too.

Fish is off, said the waiter. It's too late. He looked gloomily at the clock on the wall, which showed that it was indeed getting on for nine o'clock.

Erik looked a little dashed for a moment, then he clapped his soft little hands and whispered to me.

I've a wonderful idea! Leave that mess.

He rose to his feet and felt in his pockets.

Look here, I haven't a penny of change. Just tip the fellow a bob and he won't charge for that so-called *risotto*. They'll put it back into the pan and serve it up tomorrow. The funeral baked meats did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables.

He laughed shrilly. I did not recognise the quotation. However, I found the shilling and he at once took it out of my hand and presented it to the waiter. I was thankful that he took this unpleasant task off my shoulders. I saw the waiter was about to protest when Erik whispered something in his ear and the old man went off muttering to himself, with the plate in his hand. Erik joined me in the street.

Now, Lise, surely there must be some food in your house?

If I know anything about skivvies, they always have mounds of food in the larder which no one else knows anything about. We'll go back and forage for ourselves.

Oh, but the maids! I cried.

Never mind the maids—if they're there. Leave 'em to me. I've a wonderful way with maids.

If he meant this as a joke, I did not see it and I think he took my wooden face as a reproof, for he went on rather humbly:

You don't mind me coming back with you, Lise? Do you, now, honestly? I'll go straight home if you do. Though to call it home, he went on bitterly, is perhaps too flattering. A filthy attic with a hole in the roof you could toss a plate through. Oh, my God, when am I going to get some recognition?

Why, I asked rather naïvely, haven't you been giving any concerts lately?

He stopped abruptly and uttered an unearthly hyena laugh.

Oh, my dear Lise, he spluttered through his cries of laughter. You're adorable!

He seized my arm and pressed it against his side. Then looking closely into my face, he said again in a lower, rather meaningful tone:

*You're adorable.*

His side felt very soft and unpleasantly warm, but he was friendly and kind and I did not like to withdraw my arm. So we walked on while he explained his position more clearly to me.

Singers like me, my dear child, he said, don't give concerts. We haven't the money. You need money, bags of money, to promote a concert. No, we wait, like so many drovers at a market, for hire. We hope that Mr. Brown will give us the Evangelist at his next *Messiah*, or that Mr. Jones will invite us to sing a ballad or two at his next popular concert in the town hall. Ah, my dear, heart-breaking work. Heart-breaking. And yet—he spoke almost venomously—I am an artist. I have temperament. I have a voice. But here in

England you could have twenty voices and every one of them a Caruso and no one would take any notice of you if you did not advertise yourself. Advertising, my dear Lise, that is the secret. And what is advertising for a singer? I'll tell you. It is taking the Cecilia Hall at a rent of fifty guineas. It is paying out another fifty for handbills, posters, newspaper advertisement (and that, believe me, is meagre). It is writing to every paper you can think of with complimentary tickets for their critics. It is giving away half the best seats in the hall to your friends to ensure an audience. It is paying a good accompanist, who has already made a name for himself, and that will cost about twenty guineas. At least a hundred and fifty pounds, my dear Lise, and you won't get a penny of it back. For who will come to your concert until you have made a name for yourself, and how can you make a name for yourself without giving a concert? Ah, Lise, heart-breaking, heart-breaking! Why did I ever do it?

I hardly knew what to say to comfort him. It did seem a sorry state of affairs and I was surprised my mother was not more willing to help him.

Shall I speak to my mother? I suggested.

Ah, if you would, Lise. If you only would. She doesn't like me, you know. I can't think why, for, God knows, I admire her more than almost any woman living (he looked at me to see how I would take this. I swallowed it). But—no, she doesn't like me. Have you ever heard her say anything about me?

No, Erik, really I haven't. I don't know anything about it.

We were entering the Square. It was almost dark now, and in most of the houses the lights were on, though the curtains were not drawn, for the evening was very warm.

If you would help me, Lise, Erik breathed, pressing my arm more closely against his side, I'd be eternally grateful to you.

Well, I will try, I said.

We had arrived at the house now, and I was rather disconcerted to see that not a single light was on. I had expected

that the maids would be up in their rooms as they had said they wanted to go to bed early, but their dormer window in the roof was in darkness and the curtains not drawn.

I looked up at them dubiously.

What's the trouble? asked Erik.

I explained about the maids, adding lamely that I supposed they must be in bed.

Oh, I expect they are, I expect they are, he said reassuringly.

I unlocked the door and we went in and turned on the lights.

Now for the kitchen, cried Erik.

I do hope it's all right, I said doubtfully.

All right? Of course it is. Whose kitchen is it? Theirs or your mother's? Who pays 'em, eh?

Well, Mother does. But they live in it and it seems really theirs.

Oh nonsense! It's down here, I suppose?

He led the way down the narrow back stairs and I followed, fearfully. I disliked the business.

Where's the larder?

What's the good, Erik? There won't be anything in it. They said there wasn't.

Don't believe it for a moment. Ah, here's the larder. I've an infallible nose for larders. What did I tell you? Plenty of food.

There was certainly plenty of food. Half a leg of mutton, a crock full of eggs, the best part of a pound of butter, cut into with a jam-smeared knife, and several plates on which lay remains of potatoes, now rather grey and tired, cold sausages, and a jam tart.

With this, said Erik, waving a delicate hand towards the larder shelves, with this and a few herbs, a handful of rice and possibly a little red wine, I could make you such a dish, Lise. But we're hungry. We can't wait. We'll have it cold.

He took a knife and cut off a large piece of meat which he stuffed into his mouth. Then holding the joint in one hand he sliced off half a dozen rather thick slabs and flung them on to a plate.

The cold potatoes, he said, speaking rather thickly through the mutton, look nasty. The sausages? No, we'll leave them for the minions' breakfast, for which they were probably designed. What can we eat with the meat? Pickles. Ah, here are pickles, but, Lise, I think I will cook the mutton. It is rather grisly cold. You can wait, can't you? I won't take long.

His own hunger he assuaged by taking substantial bites from the jam tart while he rapidly sliced up some onions, and instructed me to get on with the business of frying them. He seemed in a high good humour and when his mouth was not full of either mutton or tart, he sang snatches of opera in his high, rather nasal voice, and made comments on his efforts as he went along.

A good note, that B flat, wasn't it?

He sang another phrase, a cadence with a trill in it, trilled again, dropped his voice a few notes and tried to trill in a low, chesty manner which seemed to please him.

Enchanting variety I can get, he said. Don't you agree? Onions doing well?

He was cutting up the meat into small cubes as he sang and talked.

*O mio tesoro*, he began. Do you think I should make a good Ottavio? Now be honest, Lise. I haven't the height, I know, but one can wear special shoes. But the voice? What about my voice? Have I the quality, do you think? Tell me frankly.

I hardly knew how to answer him. I knew my mother did not care for Erik, whether as a person or a musician I did not know.

I don't think I'm any judge, I said cautiously. Yet I liked his voice in a way and thought it sounded very Italian and genuinely operatic.

Don't be so modest, Lise, said Erik. Tell me what you think. You're as good a judge as any.

I think you've got a—a lovely voice.

He stared at me, the kitchen knife held poised in his hand.

How sweet of you, Lise. How adorable of you, he said,

and advanced towards me. I turned hurriedly to the pan of onions.

You really think that about my voice? he murmured very close to my ear, and put his arm round me.

Well, yes, I do, I like it very much, I said. He pressed his hand against my side and kissed my cheek.

Wonderful Lise, he murmured.

The onions are nearly done, I said. Oughtn't the meat to go in?

The meat? Ah, yes, the meat, cried Erik and tossed it with an artistic flourish into the pan.

Now we must have some wine, Lise. To celebrate this little dinner together. Where's the wine kept? There's a cellar, I suppose?

Oh, no, Erik! I cried. You can't. Besides, it's probably locked.

Your mother would be glad for us to have it, said Erik calmly. We need it. This is the door, I suppose? But you're right, of course, it is locked. How suspicious your mother is.

I suppose she thought the maids might drink it.

Ah, you wealthy people and your maids. Happy the house that has no maids and leaves its wine unlocked. This is a disappointment to me, Lise.

If you want some so badly as that you could go and get it at the King's Arms. That's where Mother usually gets the drinks.

Splendid! Will she have an account there, do you think? Yes, I'm sure she will. Keep an eye on the pan, Lise, and I'll be back in no time. Clever, clever little girl to think of it.

He put both arms round me and kissed my mouth. His own tasted unpleasantly of greasy mutton fat. Then he stood back and surveyed my—no doubt—blank acceptance and acquiescent, polite face.

Funny little Lise, he said and his hands slipped round my shoulders and pressed my breasts. Then he dropped his arms and darted off up the back stairs.

I turned to the stove with my heart thumping and my

cheeks on fire. I was feeling a little light-headed with hunger. It was now nearly ten o'clock and I had had little to eat since breakfast, for the restaurant car had provided a very poor lunch and I had not been, in any case, in the mood to eat much then. How immensely far away it all seemed. Only twelve hours separated me from Folliotts, from Edward and Mrs. Yeo, and it seemed years. I was leading the artistic life of which I had boasted. I found it a little frightening.

Erik came back with a bottle under his arm.

Got it on tick, he said, with a grin, and put it on the table.

It was a bottle of champagne.

I told him there was a party going on here—Madame just home from abroad—you just back from a successful tour in the provinces—God, such a yarn I pitched him! I had the greatest difficulty in getting away with only one bottle, but I didn't like to batten on your mother. Now then, Lise, a tray.

We piled the food and cutlery on the tray and Erik carried it up to the drawing-room.

I hate dining-rooms, he said. So Victorian. Let's eat here.

The drawing-room ran from back to front of the house, though it could be partitioned into two, as it was at present. We sat in the back half. The curtains were undrawn and outside a deep lilac sky was visible above the roofs and walls on to which the room looked. Erik drew the curtains.

What fun this is, he said, and piled my plate high with food. Champagne and fried mutton and onions. What a meal, eh?

It certainly was a good meal. Erik was very talkative and full of himself, and I could not help liking him. His vanity and self-advertisement were so blatant and undisguised that they acquired the merit at least of honesty and I began even to believe in him myself. At last he wiped his mouth and sat back. He ate very fast and I had still a good deal on my plate to get through. He had drunk two glasses of champagne and done his best to persuade me to finish my first and have another, but I found it so heating and the night was already

warm enough. I missed the perpetual breeze of a seaside town and the open wind-swept marshes that stretched in front of Folliotts. Here in London the complete airlessness oppressed me. The sky was a copper dome, and the houses fried in their dust. There hung about them and about the alleys and backyards an air which seemed to have been there for weeks, so stale and exhausted was it. The dinner Erik had insisted on cooking had been greasy and strong and though I had been hungry enough, I found now that it was difficult to swallow; the drink only increased my discomfort and at last I pushed away my plate and said I could not eat any more.

It's so hot, I said, and went over to the window. An air even warmer than that within the room arose from the yards and wells around and enclosed the whole house in a dense sheath of stifling atmosphere. I turned back to the room. Erik was watching me, lying stretched out in one of the easy chairs, smoking one of my mother's cigarettes. He said nothing. There seemed nothing more to say. There was between us no longer a conversation but a situation and one in which I did not know the first thing about the moves. I was forced to deal empirically with each as it arose. When I came back to my chair, Erik offered me a cigarette.

I don't smoke, I said. He stood near me with the cigarette-box in his hand.

You think it's bad for the voice?

Well, I don't know, but I don't like it anyhow.

It is bad for it, I suppose, but I can't keep off it. God, one has to have some pleasure in life.

He set the box on the mantelpiece and squatted down on the rug beside me.

If you want to be cool, always lie on the floor, he said, and suited the action to the word, stretching himself out like a fat spaniel at my feet.

I tried to deflect the course of our progress by a practical and common-sense—one might almost call it a scientific—manœuvre.

But why should it be cooler on the floor, Erik? I enquired with an assumed interest I was far from feeling.

The hot air, my dear Lise, rises. (He pointed aloft with a graceful, podgy hand and brought it back to rest on my knee.) But cool air sinks. Also the draughts come whistling along the floor. Really, it's lovely down here, Lise. Like being on a beach. You try it.

He cocked an enquiring eye at me, but I stayed where I was. I wondered when he intended to go. It was now after eleven. He seemed altogether too comfortable, and his hand was exploring my thigh.

We don't need all these lights, he said suddenly and got up. We must try and save your poor mother some money.

He walked over to the door and turned them out, but at my side was a reading lamp and I switched it on at almost the same moment. I thought he looked a little disconcerted, but he recovered himself and seemed at no loss about the next move.

Let's lie on the floor, Lise, and pretend we're sunbathing at the seaside. The lamp can be the sun and really, if you lie on your back here and look up at the vast ceiling, it looks awfully like the sky.

He had flung himself down again and, having removed his coat and rolled it into a pillow, was unbuttoning his shirt and exposing to the dim radiance of the lamp a white, over-plump chest. He caught my hand and gave me a jerk out of the chair which took me off my guard and brought me down beside him almost before I knew where I was.

There, he said comfortably. Now you can sunbathe too.

I lay there stiff, unmoving, trying to collect myself. I found Erik horribly unattractive. I could not bear to have him making love to me and I knew he was about to. Yet I had a fear of masculine strength and a quite ridiculous belief, bred of my reading, in the violability and weakness of girls, which made me wonder desperately how I should ever repel him and what would happen to me if I did not.

Sunbathe too, he murmured coaxingly, rolling over on his

stomach. He stretched his arm up to me and began to undo the neck of my frock.

Don't be ridiculous, Erik, I said uncertainly.

Not ridiculous at all. Ah, you've the advantage of me. You've been sunbathing already, haven't you. I expect you're a lovely colour.

No, I haven't been. I never bathed. And I hate my skin to get sunburnt.

He slipped his hand inside my dress and felt delicately over my skin with his finger-tips.

You're right, of course, Lise. Always right, wonderful Lise. A woman's skin is horrible, sunburnt. Yours is delicious, the texture of satin.

He leaned his weight on me. Repelled as I was, I was far more frightened of the attraction of this contact. I could feel spreading upwards and all over me, from somewhere in the pit of my stomach, a fiery glow, which his increasing weight and the pressure of his hands accelerated and which threatened every succeeding second to commute the marrow in my bones to fire. With a sudden frenzied effort I pushed Erik away and scrambled to my feet. He did not protest. He lay on his back and, speaking in a rather drowsy voice, asked me what was the matter.

I don't want to, Erik.

Don't want to what? he drawled in his reedy voice.

Oh, you know what I mean. I—I can't bear it. I'm sorry. I believe little Lise is frightened of me.

No, I'm not. Perhaps I am frightened of myself.

Ah, then you *do* like me a little. The feelings are too strong for you, eh? He said it with the utmost complacency. He sat up and locked his arms round his knees, looking at me almost with impudence.

I don't like you enough for that, I said desperately.

Now, now, that's unkind. I have many good qualities, but I know that good looks are not one of my advantages.

Oh, it's not that, I lied hastily.

I'm glad to hear it. I thought you had romantic notions

and longed for an Adonis. There are none, believe me. All men are satyrs.

I said nothing.

Or perhaps you have moral scruples?

He looked at me with interest as though I were something rather rare and peculiar.

Erik, I cried, miserably. I can't bear it. All this talk. Please leave me alone. Go home. Oh, God, what's that? I started violently, for downstairs there was a noise of a door opening and stealthy footsteps.

Erik got up and I found myself clinging to him.

Erik, someone's downstairs.

Erik put me on one side and walked deliberately to the door and turned the key.

At least they can't get in here, he said. I have no wish to be murdered. Let's continue our interesting conversation. Perhaps if they hear us talking they will go away.

When I saw Erik turn the key, I think I felt a great relief. I was almost fond of Erik. He switched out the reading lamp. Together we waited in the darkness. I was very conscious of the beating of my heart.

Do you feel safe with me? whispered Erik. It was the key not Erik which gave me any security that I had, but I could not bear to disappoint him further, so I said I did. There were still sounds from below, but nothing came upstairs. Slowly Erik turned me towards him and, holding me against him, gave me a long and expert kiss. I could not detach myself. I could only endure it. His mouth was unpleasantly wet and his teeth were sharp and cut into my lip. I pulled myself away at last and pushed my way past the arm-chair to the reading lamp. Switching it on, I went quickly to the door and, trembling, unlocked it. I think Erik was too surprised to realise what I was doing till it was too late.

Who's there? I called out in a rather shaky voice. Who's down there? |

There was a moment's pause and then the voice of Gertrude, the elder of the two maids, came up to me.

Why, it's us, Miss. We didn't know as how you was still up. We're just getting a bite of supper.

Oh, I called. Oh, I see. I—I thought you were in bed.

We're sorry if we disturbed you, now came the voice of Bertha, the second maid.

I—I'll see you in the morning, I quavered. Go to bed now. I turned back to Erik.

What are we to do? I whispered. They think I'm in bed.

Well, let's go to bed. He stuck out his lower lip and grinned at me. I'm ready.

No, Erik, please. Please leave me alone.

Little prude, he said, suddenly sulky.

I don't know what to do with you, I said. They mustn't know you're here.

Why not? They probably know a good deal else.

I didn't read any significance into this remark and went on, You'll have to sleep in here on the sofa. I'll lock you in and—and, oh, I'll make up some excuse about it tomorrow. And then you can get away when they are not about.

Am I a criminal to be locked up all night and smuggled out tomorrow?

No, no, of course not a criminal. But they mustn't know you are here.

Lise, that's not the reason. I wouldn't have thought it of you. I thought you had more—free-heartedness than this, more generosity. Lise, let me stay with you.

But every time I looked at him, with his dishevelled greasy hair, his shirt open and that lardlike flesh beneath it, the pudgy, inquisitive fingers and unpleasantly full, moist lips, I was more repelled. How could I let him go as far as he did? I refused to listen to his pleas and I left him sitting sulkily on the sofa, with his chin in his hands. Next morning, when I released him, I found that he had drained the champagne bottle and relieved himself in the grate.

The next few days and nights were, I think, the most horrible I have ever spent. I did not wish to eat my meals in any local restaurants for fear of meeting Erik or others of my

mother's coterie, so I ate them in solitude in the house and very nasty they were, for Gertrude and Bertha were scarcely civil to me. They resented my return and clearly thought that I was spying on them and reporting their behaviour to my mother. They must have felt that there was little to be gained but extra work from my presence in the house, and since they were sure to get the sack anyway they were determined to enjoy themselves on my mother's wages as long as they could. They therefore did the minimum work, and indeed were often not in the house at all. They gave me cold or badly-cooked meals, and made only the merest pretence of keeping the rooms and hall clean. I could never have a bath, for they refused to light the boiler, averring that it made the basement like an inferno. I was a great deal too lenient with them. Had I been less soft they would have respected me more and might even, perhaps, have looked after me in some fashion.

I wrote several letters to Arevski, but I never got as far as posting any of them. When it came to the point something made me tear them up. I was no longer sure that my vocal powers were such as to impress the great teacher and I knew enough of the singing profession to realise that a man of Arevski's standing did not take on any pupil who was not of extraordinary potentialities.

I tried, of course, to practise. I went into the empty music-room and found the air stale and flat, for no windows had been opened there since we went away. The dust was thick on the piano and the floorboards, and dead flies adorned the dirty window-sills. I opened a window, cleaned up the piano, and from time to time went in and attempted to practise. My voice echoed back at me, for the room was extremely resonant. I had never been aware of this echo before. Perhaps I had always heard above it the congratulatory tones of my mother and her friends. Now there was nothing in the whole house but myself and my own echo which I must perforce hear.

I looked in vain for letters. I knew, of course, that neither

Felix nor my mother could get a letter back to me yet, but I hoped there would be something forwarded from Folliotts or even a letter from Edward himself. But there was nothing. I wrote to Mrs. Yeo and thanked her for having me, and was conscious that the letter was very stiff and unnatural. I tore it up and wrote an almost exactly similar one. Then I added a postscript, *Give my love to Edward*, sealed it up and posted it.

On the fifth morning of my solitude—a morning spent in mooning about the house, trying to avoid the maids, and in attempted and fruitless practice—I settled down at last to write to Felix again and poured out to him some of the misery accumulated in my heart. I begged him to persuade my mother to come back and endeavoured to frighten her into acquiescence by graphic descriptions of my vocal distresses and difficulties. I made it sound as if—and indeed I was half-way to believing it—some physical impediment was growing up in my throat and affecting my voice.

Lunch-time came and Gertrude appeared with a tray. They did not trouble to lay the dining-room table now, and I ate my meals on a small table in the drawing-room. On the tray was a plate with some pressed meat, surrounded with pieces of tomato and cold potatoes, and a glass dish of prunes muddled up with sago.

Gertrude, I had this for supper last night, I protested, feeling my cheeks go pink.

Yes, Miss, there was some left and it seemed wicked to throw away good food. I didn't think you'd mind. It's difficult catering for one.

You and Bertha are having it too? I was bold enough to enquire, and Gertrude retorted with a brazen stare.

Of course, Miss. I don't know what you mean by the question.

No, no, all right, Gertrude, I said hastily and watched her depart with sinking heart. It was all I could do to swallow such unappetising meals and I could not help wondering why it was that such a smell of cooking had pervaded the house all the morning, if that was all that I was to be offered.

I ought to have asked Gertrude about those smells. I would do so at supper, I told myself, postponing the hour of my inevitable humiliation.

The afternoon dragged wearily. It was very hot, each succeeding day producing upon the dewless streets and walls a deeper degree of dryness. Old party walls shifted a little, fissures appeared and already existing cracks widened, the trees in the square drooped and their sooty bark peeled off, leaving leprous patches of white upon the lower parts of their trunks. The house itself was fairly cool; I sat at the back in the drawing-room, looking over the low roofs of the mews, and thinking forlornly of Felix. Somehow the ecstasy of those first letters had evaporated. I never looked at his song now, and often, when an unnamed indefinable emotion shook me and I buried my head in my hands, it was Edward who would come into my mind, not Felix. It was Edward I wondered about, whose occupation I would dearly have liked to know during these hot, holiday hours. In my heart I regretted the foolish way I had left Lodmouth, but I was far too ashamed to go back. I could only pray for Felix and my mother to return and draw me firmly back into the orbit where I believed—though with diminishing conviction—that I belonged.

It was about four o'clock. No tea appeared and I assumed that the maids had gone out for the afternoon. They claimed an excessive number of half days, which they declared that Madame had promised them. As I was sitting in the drawing-room at the back of the house, I did not hear the voices coming down the Square, the steps up to the front door, and the noisy colloquy that no doubt took place there. My thoughts were down at the sea-swept Island and I was just re-enacting that painful scene when I had struck Edward with a stone, when the front door bell pealed, horribly loud in the dry, empty house. I waited, hopelessly, for the maids to answer it. Surely one of them would be in. But the bell was pulled again, this time more noisily, and it was clear that I was alone in the house. I wondered whether I should

answer it. I was full of fears and these days of solitude had made me excessively nervous. Then I heard a high-pitched voice, somewhat muffled, calling:

Lise! Aren't you in, Lise?

I felt a rush of relief to think that it was only Erik, and came running out of the drawing-room to the top of the stairs.

You are in, then? Lise, come and open the door. I'm not alone, added the voice, ingratiatingly.

The letter-box shut with a snap and I went down and opened the door. Outside were Erik and two other people, one of whom I knew, while the other was a stranger. The latter was a tall, rather thin girl, with very red hair and a white, drawn face. Erik's other companion was a man I had often met at my mother's parties, Norman Harbutt. He was always full of theories and appeared to wield great influence in musical circles, for my mother always seemed anxious to appease him and put up with more rudeness from him than I liked. Erik came in immediately and ushered the other two after him.

You know Norman, of course, he said. This is Norman's mistress, Dulcie. She's got a marvellously aristocratic name really, but I can never rememb. it.

Monteith-Saumerez, drawled the red-haired girl with half-closed eyes, and taking Norman Harbutt's hand she whispered quite audibly in his ear, She can't be a singer, no, no, *carissimo*, I don't believe it! She then fastened upon me a long, curious and slightly impertinent stare, under which I writhed uncomfortably (having heard her whispered remark) as I listened to the effervescent Erik. He did not appear in the least in awe of Norman, which rather surprised me, used as I was to my mother's deference and also to Felix's attitude to him, which was almost sycophantic. As I was to discover, Erik was far more concerned with getting the next meal than with furthering his career as a singer. Certainly he did his best to persuade my mother to introduce him to influential people who might give him work, but he never pursued his

requests very eagerly. He tossed them away good-humouredly, as though half expecting them to be refused, as though indeed he was aware that there was something ludicrous about them, but he was always careful to arrive in time to be invited to a meal. So now, as we sat ourselves down in the drawing-room, he turned to me and said, I've been trying to persuade Norman to give me a job on that paper of his. I think I'll turn music critic. There might be more money in it.

I knew Norman's magazine. We took it regularly. It was expensively produced and carried articles on music of a provocative nature, ardently upholding the new school of what my mother called cacophonists. It also had live music criticism of a highly prejudiced type. It was violent and frequently bordered on libel, which its editor cared nothing for, having plenty of money to pay off any suit. He was a man whom my mother invited to the house herself, whereas most of those who came invited themselves.

He won't take me on, though, said Erik ruefully.

My dear Erik, said Norman in a voice heavy with culture. He loved to pause in the middle of a sentence so that his hearers were kept waiting for some crucial word.

My dear Erik, music criticism is—beneath you. Yes, my dear fellow, beneath you. It is the work of—scribblers. Whereas you are, I think, are you not? (another favourite device of Norman) an artist.

Hungry work, being an artist, said Erik. I'd rather be a scribbler.

Oh, no, cried the red-haired girl, effusively. It is the artists who create the new world. The critics merely—merely——

Her invention gave out.

Shall I put in a word for you, Dulcie? asked Norman with a slow smile.

Do, my darling, clever lover, cried Dulcie, and kissed his hand.

Merely act as signposts. We can't compel, we cannot hold our hearers with our glittering eye. But we can—point.

Let's hope you'll point to me, then, said Erik. This way to

Erik Barnaby, lyric tenor . . . (he looked at me for a moment) and to Lise, of course, he added, This way to Lise Reinhart, dramatic soprano, is that right?

Yes, I answered uncomfortably.

Oh, said Dulcie, looking at me with her frank stare. Do you sing?

Of course she sings, said Erik. She's a daughter of the great Reinhart.

Oh, darling. I'm so terribly ignorant, but I never heard of Reinhart. He sounds like a circus owner. Was he?

I could not bring out my words. Norman was delighted.

Oh, isn't it marvellous, he crowed, more to Erik than to me. Isn't it marvellous that she's so adorably ignorant?

It's wonderful, agreed Erik, but there was in him that streak of sardonic humour which saved him from the utter fatuity of his companions.

Reinhart, he said to Dulcie, was a great opera singer. Before your time.

Oh, said Dulcie, but all the same I don't see why having a father who's a great singer makes her into one. After all, look how different I am from my parents. There they are, Sir Michael de Saumerez and his lady, so blue-blooded they can hardly breathe, and my father James in the Guards, quite inevitably, darlings. But isn't it a scream? All of them so starchy and county and huntin', etc., and little me, their daughter, kicking right over the traces, living *the life*, the bohemian life, in London. (She cast an adoring look at Norman and added with an admiring giggle at herself), Living in sin. I'm dying to have an illegitimate baby. A real little illegit. But Norman says no. (She pouted.) It's too bad it won't let its Dulcie have its little baby.

I was horrified. Never had I heard such conversation. Feeling that it was incumbent upon me as hostess to steer everyone back on to more normal topics, I said:

How's the magazine?

It stinks, replied Norman briefly.

I was a little puzzled at this, thinking it hardly a recom-

mendation for a periodical, but Erik enlightened me.

Yes, he means it stinks of all the corpses laid out within. The last number slaughtered Holst, Vaughan Williams and the entire folksong school. Laid them out in rows on the mortuary table. It was damned clever stuff, Norman.

I wrote most of it—with a hey, nonny, nonny, he added in a sepulchral voice, and Dulcie found this so excruciatingly funny that she rolled off her chair on to the floor and shrieked. Norman leaned over and smacked her bottom and order was, temporarily, restored.

I doubt—and Norman leaned back in his chair and puffed out his cheeks a little—I doubt if we shall hear much more of Vaughan Williams again. Of course Holst is a—different matter. He can write *music*. But he's tainted . . . tainted. He needs the—surgeon's knife. I said to Holst only last week, just before that number came out, in fact, My dear fellow, the day you set foot in the folksong camp, you're doomed, doomed.

But, I said artlessly, I think folksongs are beautiful.

There was a silence. Dulcie burst into laughter.

Oh, darling, how wonderfully out of date you are. Absolutely Victorian. You ought to wear tweeds and hob-nail boots and go tramping about the country listening to smelly cottagers singing.

Yere I be a keepin' me fold, me feet is warm and me arse is cold, chanted Norman in a voice intended to be that of the country ballad singer.

Erik saw my discomfiture and interrupted:

Go on, Norman, there are some beautiful folksongs, you know, she's right. It's their influence that's pernicious.

But Erik was unable to check Dulcie's exuberant interest in me.

Oh, but it's all so unbelievable! she babbled.

What is? asked Erik.

That Miss Reinhart should want to be an opera singer.

She stared at me and I felt myself turning deep red. Norman seemed to find the conversation delightful and stroked

Dulcie's hair with fatherly approval, but I think Erik was determined to help me. He rose to his feet and walked rapidly about the room, talking very fast in his high voice, and waving his hands about a good deal as if he wanted to attract attention to himself.

Norman, old fellow, what is it you want? You condemn folksong and exercise your wit on the Kennedy Frasers—what was it you called them, something very clever, I seem to remember?

The Kennedy Frasers, drawled Norman. Oh, those Hebridean creatures. Yes, I think I did mention them, er—ar—er—

Erik waited, poised on his toes, swinging a little, his hands in the pockets of his wide, creased trousers. He looked like one of those little celluloid toys that are weighted at the bottom and cannot be pushed over however far you swing them from side to side.

No, said Norman at last after profound thought. No, I can't remember what I called them.

Something to do with a love-lilt, darling, interposed Dulcie.

Ah, yes, that's right. I remember now. The Eriskay love-philtres, guaranteed to make anyone fall in love with folksong.

Very clever, pursued Erik doggedly. What do you want?

You should know, Erik. You read the magazine, I think. At least, I always give you a copy. I know it would be useless to expect you to buy one.

I'm only a poor singer, Norman. I can't read. Though I'm grateful for the magazine. I look at the pictures.

I thought as we were coming along you were trying to persuade me to take you on as a music critic?

I don't need to write to be a music critic. I can have a devoted amanuensis. I could dictate. Like this. He stopped tipping himself backwards and forwards and—without hesitation, almost without a breath—he delivered the following speech:

Mr. Blank is not only one of the most distinguished of our

younger composers, but one of the most *significant* (Erik dwelt lovingly on the word). Not for Mr. Blank the warm shallows of melody. Not for Mr. Blank the sustaining deeps of Elgarian harmony. He has thrown himself headlong into the flood and emerged from the depths, dripping indeed, but grasping in his hands those twin monsters, Jazz Rhythm and the Twelve-tone scale, which have for some years now been a source of terror to the timid who hug the shores of this vast sea. (Observe how I stick to my metaphors, interposed Erik, unlike some critics.) He grapples with them. He fights desperately to subdue them to his will. And if at present we witness in this symphony only the frightful and hideous writhings as of another Laocoon, there are signs that, unlike that unfortunate Greek hero, Mr. Blank will not succumb, but will bend to his own purposes these modern monsters and produce a work of lasting power and *terrible* beauty.

Well? he said, at the end of it.

Dulcie yawned.

Fourth-form stuff, old fellow, said Norman, but it was too near his own style to amuse him.

You were asking me just now, he went on quickly, before Erik had time to say anything more. You were asking me what I *do* want. I will tell you.

Norman was never loath to expatiate upon his theories. I had heard him before, doing so to my mother and her friends, and rather wearily I saw him prepare himself to deliver a speech. He had an unbounded belief in himself and his mission and sufficient private means to run his magazine, *New Music*, at a colossal deficit. He had a small and ardent following who found in him a kind of prophet. The magazine always appeared with his photograph on the cover, looking profound, and his disciples often tried out their compositions in this very drawing-room. They were then discussed lengthily and usually with much praise in the pages of *New Music*. He was always careful to pay a tribute to my mother: "This work was heard privately at the house of Madame Reinhart, that enlightened patroness of modern music," or

something of that sort. My mother, was, in fact, unsure whether his ideas were really sound or not, and it was only, I think, as a kind of insurance policy that she put up with the presence of Norman in her house and provided for him an audience whom he usually succeeded in offending or frightening.

The twentieth-century composer, began Norman pontifically, is . . . an urban composer. We are an urban civilisation and a cruel civilisation. A harsh, ugly . . . concrete civilisation. The artist cannot turn his back on it, and find refuge in folksong or sentimental light opera. It is his duty to capture in his music the spirit of this harsh . . . urban . . . concrete . . . civilisation. Do you know what, in my opinion, is the finest work this century has yet produced?

We all waited.

Peffner's symphonic poem, the *Power Station*.

Doesn't interest us, does it, Lise? said Erik. We can't sing it. I was grateful to him at that moment.

Ah, said Norman darkly. I don't want to discourage you two, but this isn't the age for singers, you know. To every age its proper instrument. Or instruments.

He leaned forward and fixed me with a fanatic eye.

Here's my advice. Learn to , ay a percussion instrument.

Oh, my God! said Erik with distaste.

It's the age of percussion, went on Norman, with rising excitement, his face red, his eyes bulging.

Percussion, percussion, percussion. Learn to bang, to shake, to rattle.

He seized Dulcie by the arm, and swept her into his lap. He thumped her behind, shook her and performed upon her limp and unresisting body such a wild display of percussion technique that I feared the poor girl would be a mass of bruises. She appeared, however, to like it and remarked in a drugged voice, when he sat back exhausted:

Norman, you darling genius!

Erik looked amused and went back to his chair, at last, saying:

If you'll lend me Dulcie to practise on, Norman, I'll start percussion tomorrow.

No, no, said Norman, find your own percussion girls, and, looking significantly at me, he grinned, baring a set of extremely yellow teeth.

Would you let him practise on you, Lise? asked Norman.

Miserably I looked at Erik and saw in his face an uncertain, poised look, as though it needed only a push to send him over into either shame or triumph. I stiffened myself. His triumph, I knew, could only come with my acquiescence. With an immense effort I spoke up for myself. In tones intended to sound dignified but only in fact prudish, I said, I don't find the conversation amusing.

More easily could I bear their laughter and derision than their assumption that I was a willing party to their implications.

Erik relaxed and sighed ruefully, with an expenditure of breath like a deflating tyre.

Still the same Lise, he said, but he looked at me with a smile of extraordinary sweetness, a smile, almost, of secret alliance. Dulcie closed her eyes and pouted.

Let's go home, Norman. This party just isn't any fun.

Norman looked at his watch.

You'll be staying, I suppose, Erik?

Erik settled himself comfortably.

It depends. There's the question of supper, isn't there, Lise? Suppose we all go out and have a meal at Bertoni's. Then we could come back here and make a party of it.

How easily he veered from one side to the other—at one moment moved facilely by my distress, and the next drawn only by the prospect of his own advantage.

D'you know, I think that's a good idea, said Norman. What about Lise?

I'd rather not, I said. I—I'm tired.

Oh, don't press her, Norman darling, cried Dulcie. I want to have a *real* party. Let's find Metrovitch and make him drunk. He plays so miraculously when he's drunk. D'you

know him? (She turned to me, but I had to shake my head. He was not one of my mother's *côterie*.) Oh, said Dulcie, with pity in her tone. If you don't know Metrovitch you haven't *lived*. D'you know, last time we had him at a party, Norman gave him a train time-table and asked him to compose a fugue on the Glasgow to London express, and he sat down at the piano and improvised the most brilliant, the most glorious piece of music you ever heard.

New music, interposed Norman darkly.

Yes, of course it was new, utterly new.

You won't come? said Erik to me, as the other two started to go down the stairs.

I'd rather not.

You don't like them, do you?

Not much.

I think they're pretty loathsome myself, but, heavens, that man has money. I can't afford not to make a friend of him, Lise. May I come back after dinner?

No, Erik, please don't. Please.

Oh, Lise, I behaved nicely this afternoon, didn't I?

Better than they have, certainly.

Well, then?

It's not saying much, is it?

No, but, Lise, I promise I won't be a nuisance. Let me come back. You don't know what my room is like. It's—it's horrible. I simply haven't a cent. I've pawned everything. I'm sleeping on the floor.

All right, I said weakly. You can come back.

Lise, you're a darling. He flung his arm round me and kissed me. I promise I'll be good.

With that he vanished down the stairs and I was left to my thoughts. They were not very pleasant ones. I sat alone in the empty drawing-room, where one chair bore the impress of Norman's heavy body, and another had lost its cushions, which Dulcie had dropped on the floor, and a third was pulled out of position to be closer to my own. Mild though the invasion had been by some standards, in my eyes it

assumed the proportions of a sack, and my revolt against it had nothing to do with defending my mother's house. I recognised quite clearly that in her eyes these people were—as I had myself seen them hitherto—members of that unconventional cosmopolitan society in which the arts are nourished. However puzzled she was by Norman, my mother none the less found it necessary to invite him to her house, and I had thought it necessary too. In any case, to drop him, once invited, was to court disaster, for he stopped short of little, and his magazine was widely read for its scandal value alone. He had always seemed to me part of the world I was to inhabit. I could not understand him, but I thought I should in time, and I imagined also that my own powers as a singer would bring me the respect and admiration of such men as Norman, the men behind the musical scene, the men who wielded a power of life and death over the unfortunate artistic executants. Moreover, like my mother (in imitation of my mother, that is), I was not at all sure that he was not a genius. In that case, one would not wish to cold-shoulder him. My mother was on the look-out for geniuses.

What was new to me was to experience these people. I had seen them, and spoken to them occasionally. I had listened to them often. But, like actors in a play, they had performed what I had understood they would perform. There was nothing surprising to me about their behaviour because it was far enough off from me. Suddenly I had found myself, as it were, behind the scenes myself, mingling with them. I was compelled to form judgments—to assess them as people, not players. I was, at last, involved.

I awaited Erik's return with a certain longing, for I wanted badly to talk out of myself the feelings I had inside me, to clarify my confused thoughts. The maids had by this time come back, and produced for me the usual indifferent meal. After I had finished I went to the music-room, taking with me the song Felix had written for me. It seemed very long ago. I could hardly believe that I had written those letters to

Felix. Perhaps it was in an attempt to re-orientate myself towards him that I took his song to the piano and played it over. Then I stood up and sang it through without accompaniment. I found it difficult to get the entries right and had constant recourse to the keyboard. I became interested in it, and found myself singing better than I had been for some time. A ring at the front door did not disturb me, I was so absorbed. I was just practising a difficult phrase over again when Gertrude announced Erik.

Oh, Erik, I cried, would you play this for me?

He seemed rather put out.

I'm not a pianist, he protested.

It's not difficult.

Oh, Lord, all in manuscript. All right, I'll have a shot.

He played Felix's accompaniment, very badly but with sufficient clarity for me to sing the vocal line through with only one or two mistakes and fumbings for a note.

What do you think of it? I asked.

Oh, well, I suppose it's not bad, as a song, he said grudgingly. A bit folksy. I can imagine what Norman would say of it.

Has he ever heard any of Felix's music?

I believe your mother made him listen to something once. Anyway I do know he has heard some. He was scathing, too scathing.

I don't suppose Norman knows as much as he makes out, I said boldly.

Really? Erik looked at me thoughtfully.

No, he said, at last. As a matter of fact I think he knows very little. Less than you do, or I do. But he's got money, and he's got the magazine, and he's got a point of view, and a certain talent for expressing it. I haven't got any of those things. He's just the man for me. By God, he gave me a good dinner, Lise. I wish you'd been there. It was worth putting up with his damn conversation and the blatherings of that moron Dulcie to get a dinner like that. What did your maids give you?

Cold fish salad.

Oh, God, how awful! Why ever didn't you come, Lise? You were stuffy, you know. Of course people like Norman aren't real artists, couldn't even be. They just play at being artists and Dulcie is one of those limbs of the aristocracy who have gone in for the bohemian life as other girls go in for dressmaking or dramatics. We're the artists, Lise. People like you and me. You know, I believe this is the first time I've ever heard your voice. It sounded rather good. Look here, Lise, I've an idea.

He was still sitting at the piano stool and he pulled me in front of him, and held me between his knees.

I've got the best idea yet. We'll put it to your mother as soon as she comes home.

What is it? I asked cautiously.

Why, a double act, my girl. A double bill. Duets for tenor and soprano. Think what we've got to draw on.

I'm not up to it, Erik. My voice isn't nearly trained yet. I'm certain Mother wouldn't let me appear in public.

Oh, nonsense! cried Erik. Not for a few months, perhaps, while we work up a repertoire.

No, not even then, Erik. It will be years, not months. You ought to know yourself. You're a singer.

I? I never got the sort of training you're having. Oh, come on, Lise! Promise me you'll suggest it to your mother.

Well, I'll mention it, but I know she won't consent. It's wildly unpractical.

I don't believe it is, said Erik stubbornly.

Why can't you find a soprano more fully-fledged than me? He grinned suddenly.

Oh, Lise, he said, you are a charming simpleton. Where do I find a soprano whose name is Reinhart?

I felt suddenly angry and pulled away from him.

Good night, Erik, I said. It's time you were going home.

Going home? Erik got up. Not on your life. I'm staying here.

No, you're not. You're going.

I went to the door.

Lise, don't be cruel. What's come over you? You weren't like this the other night.

Perhaps it was the champagne.

Well, let's drink another bottle. It won't take me ten minutes to pop down and get it. Oh, come on, Lise! Let's enjoy ourselves. I don't believe you know what it's like to enjoy yourself. That mother of yours keeps you tied to her apron strings so that you've never had a chance to see life.

I don't know that I want to see life, I just want to live.

Well, that's what I mean.

Is it? But I *do* live.

Go on. You *could* do if that mother of yours would let you. You were pretty hot stuff the other night anyway.

I don't remember being——

Ah, now, that's the champagne, darling.

I felt a horrible misgiving that in fact I had allowed him to go much further than I had remembered. I was filled with self-disgust.

The maids are in tonight, Erik. If you won't go, I'll call them.

Lise, my sweet, how melodramatic you are.

Well, I've got to get rid of you. Somehow, I said desperately.

But you haven't, you haven't. It's all so easy. Here we are and the rest of the night is ours.

I don't want it to be. Look, Erik, if only you'll go away now I promise you I'll talk to my mother about the duets idea.

Oh, I've lost interest in that now, he retorted sulkily. I just want you.

He was like a disappointed child, and like a child too in that his desires were divided. He wanted me, an immediate need, but his cunning instinct told him that I was the type who would keep my word about speaking to my mother, if only he went away. He did not know which desire to sacrifice, and stood by the door, kicking his shoe petulantly against the wainscot, and thrusting out his lower lip. His

skin was beaded with sweat. Short as he was, and standing hunched up and slack, I could look down on him. His dark hair was thick with scurf and the back of his coat collar was white with it.

Erik, I said, breathing rather quickly at the magnitude of what I was saying, Erik, I don't love you, I can't love you.

His whole face changed. He guffawed loudly and leaned back against the lintel of the door, exposing to me the dark red cavity of his mouth, like an open drain.

Who talked of love? he bellowed, exploding with gusts of laughter. Oh, Lise, my dear, you're as good as a play!

He shook and spluttered with a kind of hysterical mirth which was most unpleasant to watch. At last he subsided weakly.

All right, he said, in a low, hoarse voice. All right, Lise darling. I know I'm not Apollo. I'll be off. By the way, did you say your maids were in?

Yes, I said, with a sinking heart.

D'you think they'd give me a glass of milk? I feel it would soothe my jangled nerves.

I'll ring for them, I answered. But the music-room had no bell. Before I could get out into the hall Erik had slithered past me—he was extraordinarily agile—and was at the top of the kitchen stairs.

I'll go down myself, he said. After all, I know the way. Night-night, Lise. Off to bed like a good girl. Don't bother to lock your door. I won't molest you.

I went to bed frightened. There was something in the house I could only feel to be evil, and I knew it had got the better of me. I had not the strength of mind to go down to the kitchen and stop whatever was going on. I knew also that a piece of me would always be compliant, that not even my personal distaste for Erik, nor self-contempt at my weakness, could destroy the response in me. I lay in my room, weeping bitterly at my own cowardice, at my utter failure to establish my own personality which made it possible for people like Erik and Norman and, worst of all, Dulcie to ride

roughshod over me, even to insult me in my mother's house. And thinking of Erik, amusing himself with the maids below stairs, I wondered whether my mother, if she knew of it, would find it so easy to condone it as mere bohemianism. I longed for her to return to take over the reins and relieve me of this hideous responsibility. Still more I longed for Felix to return. Here surely the response I so feared would be legitimate, and no kiss of Felix's could carry with it the taint of evil that Erik's moist lips possessed. I could not sleep. I was in that trance-like state of sleeplessness when one lies immobile, subjected utterly to the workings of the mind. It is not the insomnia of discomfort or pain or violent emotion—indeed one's eyes are closed and the body seems to slumber, but the mind takes possession and gives to the inward eye a vivid performance in that inner theatre in which so many theories and arguments and alternative decisions strut like actors in a Greek comedy, and the conscience or spiritual element, call it what you will, interposes an occasional chorus, couched in elegant language, but totally unaffecting to the action upon which it has no right to do more than comment, even if in disapproval.

At last these thoughts, this trance-like bodily condition, were interrupted by sounds below in the house. The front door slammed, and footsteps ran down the steps. Fully awake, I got up and went to the window. In the clear moonlight I could see the short, rotund figure of Erik scuttling like a crab across the Square. His hat was in one hand, and the other was deep in his trousers' pocket. Even at this distance, I could detect in his bearing a self-satisfaction which had been absent from his appearance earlier that evening. It showed in the roll of his hips and the cock of his head. I saw him go with relief.

The nights were colder now. I pulled a dressing-gown round me and, with my thoughts fresh in my mind, leaned out to relate them to the visible world. All round me stood the darkened, silent windows, only an occasional yellow square of light betraying some non-sleeper like myself. A

faint wind from the river near-by, reaching me over the rooftops and through the streets, put the trees gently in motion and set up a faint susurrantion which gave a tremor of life to the empty Square. I remembered nights when I had leaned out of my window at Folliotts and rested my gaze on the moon-washed sea, pale beyond the black marsh. Then I had longed for Felix to be with me, to share with me a beauty that I found incomplete by myself. Looking out on this London scene, my thoughts turned to Felix and to Folliotts, to the person and the place I loved above all others and which I had interwoven in my mind, making of Edward the stranger and the intruder.

At last, the September night air proving too much for me, I went back to bed and fell into a deep sleep from which the knock of the postman awoke me. I turned over and waited for the sound of the chain rattling back, the bolts being drawn, but there was silence into which the postman's second knock echoed thunderously. I hurried into my dressing-gown and ran down the stairs. There was a small parcel and two letters. The letters were from my mother and Felix. The parcel was a sample of some kind of invalid food, I forget what. I remember putting it, in my excitement, in a dark corner of the hat-stand, where it was not discovered till months afterwards when it had gone quite mouldy. This annoyed my mother very much. She had a passion for samples and had apparently been eagerly looking forward to this one. Her letter to me was short. It informed me that they were on their way home and would indeed probably arrive in London that very night. Felix's letter was incoherent. I could hardly make it out.

Lise, it started, with no endearment at all. How well I remember that. The rest is only recollected.

Lise, we are on our way home. I wonder what has made you leave Lodmouth so suddenly. We've left rather suddenly too, but it's better. I can't work out here, though that has nothing to do with it. Perhaps I feel as you do

about Lodmouth, an unwillingness to surrender—to the leather shorts and the songs to a guitar. I shall find it easier when I am back in London. But for God's sake, Lise, no complications. Are we getting too sentimental? Cannot you understand? It's better to surrender—you to Lodmouth, I to—my particular Lodmouth, Bellingham Square if you like. We shan't see much of each other there. Lise, don't rush at me when I get back. Ignore me. Don't be hurt if I ignore you. We'll find time to be together. Of course we will, but give me time. *Don't rush.*

Such was Felix's letter. I was so stunned with misery that I sat for some time in my room unable to move. I gave no thought to the curious fact that there was still no sound from below stairs, that my breakfast had not arrived, and no doors had been unbolted. It was ten o'clock when I realised that there was no sign of the maids. I mounted to their attic. Both bedrooms were deserted, the beds unmade, the slops unemptied. Their clothes and possessions were gone. Frightened, I went hurriedly down to the basement. On the kitchen table were the remains of a substantial breakfast. The fire was out and stone cold. The tea in the pot was hardly lukewarm. Obviously they had had their meal long before. They had stolen away in the early hours of the morning, while I was still asleep. Their desertion, coming on top of all else I had endured, was too much for me, and leaning my head on the greasy kitchen table I wept bitterly, while the cat rubbed against my legs and yowled unceasingly for its overdue breakfast.

Throughout that day I had time enough on my hands to consider in detail this homecoming. In many ways it bore a strange resemblance to the return which had taken place nearly two years before. But then I had nothing to occupy my mind but my apprehensions. What was to come was quite unknown to me, and, as it turned out, quite different from what I had imagined.

Now I knew what to expect, and feared it. I could see the situation—that is, my interpretation of it—as a whole, like a three-part madrigal on the printed page. As long as it remained there, silent, I was able endlessly to review it and hear in my head its harmony, but I doubted my own capacity to hold my part without error when it came to singing it. Though I longed for Felix, therefore, I dreaded the resumption of our life together in my mother's house.

I made a somewhat amateurish attempt to get the place ready for them. I went out and bought some flowers. For ten days there had not been a flower in the house and I had never noticed it amid the general discomfort. Now, when I returned with a huge bunch of michaelmas daisies and dahlias, the bitter aroma rising from the decaying leaves and strong, rank flowers reminded me painfully of the scent which used to float up from the warm flower-beds beneath my window at Folliotts when I looked out at night to the sea. In an empty house thoughts are only too ready to impose their companionship. I even talked to myself as I wandered about arranging the flowers, and dusting the grey film from mantelpiece and shelf. Having made the drawing-room a little more pleasant to look at, I went to my mother's room and made up her bed with clean linen. The room had a horribly neglected air, that did not seem to come solely from her few weeks' absence. I did not know how to dispel it. It frightened and fascinated me, this room. I felt that within it was a secret which, if only I could discover it, would be of importance to me. I could not leave the room alone. Ordinarily I rarely entered it. I don't know that I had ever been in it before by myself. I returned to it again and again, always, of course, with a perfectly reasonable excuse. I had not put out a face towel. I had left the soap on the landing. The vases would look better placed elsewhere. And every time, I hesitated. I stood in the big empty room, with its silk-covered bed, its immaculate dressing-table, and I looked, in vain, for my mother. I could not bring her into the room by a thought or a remembrance. In the drawing-room I

found it easier to call up her presence, but only in company with other people. I saw her smiling at the bowed, white head of Dr. Fischer, who always kissed her hand and treated her with exaggerated courtesy. He was one of my father's oldest friends. Or I saw her listening intently to Norman, who, with his bulging eyes fixed on her face, was deliberately insulting her.

All this singing, he snarled. Move with the times, Madame Reinhart. There will come a day—I prophesy it—when the symphony orchestra will contain a six-cylinder engine and a circular saw.

Oh, you ridiculous man! breathed my mother, her cheeks rather pink. But she was always uncertain—might Norman perhaps be right?

Have you heard Felix's new sonata? It's written in—— she would begin and he would interrupt her rudely.

Sonata? Sonata? Is he still writing sonatas? Invite me to hear him when he's written something new, dear lady, something of the twentieth century.

And then, putting on his hat although he had not left the room, he went on, When he does, I will enrol him in my Company of Five—and here his bulging eyes contracted like a snail's, for he was secretive about this project. It was intended to rival Les Six of France, but he had so far achieved no more than one concert with his prospective team, an oddly flat and unscandalous affair considering the immense publicity he had given it and the cacophony we had been promised. *The Times* critic had described it as a damp squib, to Norman's fury.

My mother might be afraid of Norman, but with most of the men who came to the house she was on terms of Patroness and Starving Artist. The musical life of London had changed a good deal during the war and many of the impresarios and agents whom she and my father had known had either died, or departed, or fallen upon evil times. Nevertheless, the name Reinhart still meant something and, standing alone in her drawing-room, I looked around me at the silver photo

frames with their signed photographs: Edouard de Reszke; Emmy Destinn; Pol Plançon.

It was their ghosts these young aspiring singers came to invoke, not to see my mother, except that she acted as medium. A curious little incident came back into my mind. A young tenor—I have long ago forgotten his name—was standing in front of a photograph of Edouard de Reszke, who had died not long before.

I wish I had heard him, he murmured.

Oh, my dear boy, cried my mother. These names become a legend. But there will always be great singers. You will be one, I feel convinced of it, if you have faith in yourself. What was it you were singing this afternoon, that song with a high B flat in it? I was *moved*, dear boy, really moved. And let me confess it, more moved than I ever was when Edouard sang it.

I saw him look at her curiously, and begin to speak. Then he shut his mouth and looked again at the photograph. He left shortly afterwards and we never saw him again at my mother's house, or indeed anywhere else. Was it just forgetfulness, or did she really not know that Edouard de Reszke was a bass? To do her justice, I think it was forgetfulness, and forgetfulness of a particular kind. She rarely forgot a face or a name belonging to it. But she was restless and always searching for something and in her pursuit she was apt to brush aside details unimportant to her immediate purpose. Thus, it was important to her to foster this young tenor, as long as it appeared that he was likely to make a name for himself, but Edouard de Reszke, whom she had once known, who had sung in her drawing-room and slept under her roof, Edouard was dead, and of no further service to her except as a name and a decoration for her mantel-piece. I looked at the clock and saw that it was half-past twelve, and at that moment the front door bell rang. They were back! I ran headlong down the stairs. My new curiosity gave me a kind of eagerness which could easily be construed as affection and I flung open the hall door with a

fine flourish of welcome. Edward was standing outside. My face must have fallen, for he said quickly, You were expecting someone else?

I thought it was my mother.

Your mother? She's not back, then?

She's coming back today.

Oh, I see. Shall I be in the way if I come in for a few moments?

I led him upstairs. I did not know what to say to him, and we sat awkwardly in the drawing-room, where Edward seemed so much an alien. We asked each other a few questions and the answers were politely given and in a few words. He seemed interested to hear that I had not started my singing lessons again since my return to London.

Was Arevski too busy to take you? he asked.

Arevski? I replied, doing my best to focus my mind on the present situation.

You came back to London to have lessons with him, said Edward with inexorable patience.

No, I answered. I—I didn't approach him after all.

There was a brief silence and then I told him I was sorry I couldn't invite him to lunch. I explained the maids' defection and he at once invited me to go out and lunch with him. For a moment I hesitated. I did not want to become too much involved with Edward and yet, already, I could feel his presence as a kind of prop against which my dependent spirit was leaning.

He got up and walked over to the window.

How yellow the leaves in the Square are, he said. The walnuts at Folliotts are still green, though the beeches up in the valley are beginning to turn a little.

Edward, I said, I will come out to lunch with you.

He took me to a good restaurant in Piccadilly and we went to an art exhibition for an hour afterwards. I don't think I was very appreciative. We wandered silently round, speaking very little. Once Edward took my arm and we stood for a few moments, motionless, before a picture of green apples

on a plate. I have no idea what the exhibition was. Only this one picture remains in my mind. Three green apples, a quintessence of greenness, of unripeness, of immaturity, gleaming solid and hard upon the fluid blue and white pattern of the plate. A small picture in a dull gilt frame, from which the green fruit shone out like lamps on a tree in darkness.

It's no good, Edward, I heard my voice saying, very small and low-pitched. It is no good. I am committed.

Your life is your own, not someone else's, replied Edward, still retaining my arm.

I am committed to someone else.

To Felix?

Yes.

And that commits you to this life as well?

Yes. If I turned my back on this life, as you call it, I should have to turn my back on Felix as well.

And you are in love with him?

Yes.

With what a rush of ease, yet accompanied by the acutest anguish, the word breathed forth from my mouth, like the release of pressure from a wound. Now in all its painful tenderness the truth lay exposed, raw and gaping. Perhaps Edward saw it in that guise too, for he turned away, releasing my arm, and fixed his eyes on the next picture. I remained staring at the green apples. And so we parted. For when at last I looked round, Edward had gone. Do not accuse me of insincerity when I say that I felt at that moment the pain of loss as I have never felt it in my whole life. What I could not do was to explain it to myself.

My mother and Felix arrived at about eight o'clock that evening. My mother's greeting was neither as fulsome nor as artificial as it had been on that occasion eighteen months before. Felix was silent and preoccupied. Both of us looked at each other furtively from time to time. Our eyes met but it seemed impossible to make any communication. My mother was upset to hear that the maids had deserted me,

and seemed ready to rush out to the employment agency then and there, till it was pointed out to her that at this hour it would hardly be open.

Then we'll picnic! she cried joyfully and with an enthusiasm and energy which a twelve-hundred-mile journey appeared to have left undiminished. She plunged down into the basement with Felix and myself stumbling after her.

Yet as she concocted, from the few things I had bought that day and put in the larder, some kind of supper for us, she was all the while restlessly looking about her, pausing every few minutes, breaking off in the middle of a sentence, and generally displaying all the symptoms of a disordered mind.

Suddenly she cried, I know what we need—company! Lise, you should have invited some friends in to welcome us back. To come home to an empty house like this, it's wretched.

Hardly empty, said Felix and looked at me. In his eyes I saw, for the first time for many months, that half-mocking penetrative look which I had first seen there on Victoria Station.

No, of course, said my mother hastily. But we need more people round us, artists, singers. I have been starved in Bavaria.

You had me, said Felix, and gave me another look. This time I returned it, shyly, and felt surge through me a feeling, half joy, half pain, like the turn of a blade so sharp that it tickles rather than tears the flesh. My mother laid down the parsley-cutter, looked directly at him and murmured tenderly, Oh, Felix!

His expression changed. It withdrew from me to her and assumed a sulky, obstinate look.

Oh, Felix! she sighed again and went on with her salad-making. Puzzled, I looked from her to Felix and was rewarded with a bitter, hard stare which froze on my face the half-smile of unreal understanding which I imagined I was bestowing on him.

For God's sake, Lise, cried my mother, take that silly grin off your face and go and get my address book.

Five minutes later she was seated at the telephone, issuing invitations like a machine-gun. Felix was dispatched to the local off-licence with a basket and I was opening tins, by myself in the kitchen, crying over them because I was so ignorant, not only about life, but about tin-opening.

Have you cut yourself? asked Felix with angry solicitude, as he put down a basket full of bottles on the table beside me.

No, no, I sobbed.

He stood beside me, his hands in his pockets.

Ah, stop it, he muttered at last, I hate women who cry.

You beast! I shouted through my tears and he almost jumped.

For God's sake, be quiet! he said anxiously. What's happened to you?

I've grown up, I retorted, staring back at him. I love you, and you treat me like dirt, as though I didn't count. You come back again—after weeks and weeks away, and you hardly look at me, much less speak to me.

There's hardly been an opportunity, has there?

There's one now.

We faced each other across the rows of opened tins, the basket of bottles, the half-made salad. I was trembling, as raw and vulnerable as a newly-emerged butterfly. Felix stared at me as though he had never seen me before. There was always about Felix an air of detachment and I could at that moment see him, almost palpably, withdrawing himself a little apart from the scene, as though to observe it in clearer detail. From this self-imposed distance he spoke to me, a voice from a cloud.

Do you want me to kiss you?

For Felix, the danger of emotional commitment was over. He had effected his withdrawal and merely offered me a small token of reparation.

I did not answer him. With a frightful effort I controlled myself and with a shaking hand I continued my work. This

time I did cut myself, and the resultant commotion, the summoning of my mother, the search for lint and bandages, the administering of brandy, and the final disposal of me in an interesting condition of faintness, flushed with alcohol, on the sofa in the drawing-room created a fresh emotional atmosphere in which we all moved more freely and comfortably.

The friends duly arrived, and for a little while I was the centre of attention. My mother intervened to explain what had happened. She answered the questions for me, and then, as soon as she went downstairs to get the food—first explaining with pathos how basely the maids had deserted her—the company disintegrated. The would-be singers attached themselves like limpets to Sadie Matthews, an extremely disagreeable old woman who was the head of one of the biggest musical agencies in London, while the would-be composers gravitated towards Norman, to whom they quoted long passages from the latest number of his magazine and told him what a wonderful influence he was having on post-war music. One person detached himself from this nest of singing birds fluttering round Sadie Matthews, and just as I was wondering whether I didn't feel well enough now to escape to the kitchen and help my mother, I heard Erik's voice behind me.

I say, have you really hurt yourself? I say, I *am* sorry.

He was standing behind the sofa, close to me, with a serious look of concern on his ludicrous face. I was rather touched by his solicitude and after a few moments I let him sit on the sofa beside me, even though he pressed his soft hips rather too closely against mine, and seemed to find a difficulty in knowing what to do with his hands without putting them somewhere upon my person.

Soon after this the food and drink appeared, and Felix made his appearance. As usual, he was dressed in outdoor clothes, and wore an air of complete surprise.

A party? he asked, lifting his eyebrows. Madame Reinhart, you are indefatigable.

I suppose I had never before been observant enough to notice the effect these entries had upon the people present. Some of the less frequent visitors were plainly taken in, but Norman looked Felix up and down coldly and asked him pointedly what compositions he had brought back from Bavaria.

None, said Felix shortly.

No? said Norman cattily in his drawling voice, sipping delicately at a glass of wine. I had hoped for a post-war version of Songs from the Bavarian Highlands . . . (he made one of his significant pauses) with words by Madame Reinhardt.

My mother did not hear this exchange, but she turned round a moment later to see Felix staring at Norman with a flushed and angry look on his face, and Norman smiling faintly over his glass of wine. She can hardly have failed to observe the hatred between them, yet she smiled gaily at Norman and cried:

Felix is working on something new, since I have been away. I am longing to hear it. Couldn't you play it now, Felix?

Felix turned away, embarrassed, and Norman's smile widened.

My mother went on, regardless.

Norman, one of these days I shall have to start a paper of my own to rival yours. Let me see, what shall I call it?

The Elgarian Echo, perhaps, suggested Norman.

Oh, you're so ultra-modern, laughed my mother.

So was Beethoven once, observed Norman sagely.

You know, whispered Erik in my ear, that's not a bad idea of your mother's. And you can see how Baltimore and Hetley (two of the budding composers present) like it, only they don't dare to say so. They'll go up and whisper to your mother as soon as they think Norman isn't looking. D'you know, I think I shall too. She might let me be the editor. It's having money makes you powerful. If Norman's magazine

had to stand on its own sales, it would be dead tomorrow.

He went away and brought me some food. I hoped he would not sit down beside me. Felix was standing quite near and when Erik got up to fetch me something to eat, I prayed that Felix would sit down in his place, but he remained standing aloof and alone. No one spoke to him. Usually my mother saw to it that the interest of the company was directed towards him and to some new work he had on hand, but Norman's attack had forestalled this and no one liked in Norman's presence to attach themselves too closely to Felix. I was still trying to find words in which to persuade him to come to me when Erik returned and sat down firmly beside me.

Look here, he began in a low voice, as soon as he had satisfied his initial hunger. Look here, you remember what I was talking to you about the other night.

I was rather startled, for I did not want him to be making improper suggestions to me in public.

About the joint concert, he prompted, and I was relieved.

Oh, yes, I replied. But I'm not good enough yet.

Nonsense, he interrupted. Your mother's in a good mood. I'll go and talk to her about it.

No, don't, Erik.

Why not?

It's no good.

Oh, but it is. Felix (he giggled) is rather out of favour, I fancy. It might be little Erik's turn.

He patted my thigh lightly with his hand and got up.

I'll be back, he whispered, and pushed his way through the crowded room to my mother, who was listening to the grievances of a little group of singers who never got engagements, while Sadie Matthews held court amid two or three older and established artists, whose names appeared with every choral society, and Norman and his coterie snarled and criticised near the door, and always appeared to be about to depart, when some member of the party discovered another bottle and refilled their glasses.

Still Felix stood alone, and I lay on the sofa, solitary. I watched him. He seemed to be debating something in his mind. What I would have given to have him speak to me, confide in me, explain what it was that caused this silence and withdrawal, but he ignored me. At last, as though with an effort, he walked deliberately up to Norman and said (I could hear the conversation clearly from where I lay):

I would like your opinion on this as the subject for an opera.

He held out a sheet of foolscap which he had taken from his pocket. Norman's face assumed a pontifical expression, achieved by narrowing his eyelids, drawing down the corners of his mouth and elevating his chin. His face was at such an angle that his vision must have swept the pasty plains of his cheeks before it could have reached the actual words on the paper.

After reading a few lines, he looked up at Felix, who was standing near, his face an expressionless blank as only his could be.

My dear fellow, I heard Norman say. Are you serious?

You read it, said Felix and looked more enigmatical than ever.

I lay there watching the scene. I could see that Norman was impressed. He held the paper in such a way that his *côterie* of composers could not see it, and their expressions of mingled incredulity and malice might have been amusing if I had been in the mood to appreciate them, but I was too puzzled and unhappy. I could not understand what was going on round me. Yet this party was very little different, on the surface, from many others which I had attended during the last eighteen months. The same extraordinary mixture of older, established musicians and young, striving artists were present. The established ones maintained a kind of rock-like existence in the centre of the room, from which they treated my mother with a distant courtesy that I later learned to recognise as patronage, while the smaller fry

avoided them with sidelong glances and centred their attention upon my mother or Norman, selecting the one from whom they most hoped to get some advantage. Executants usually chose my mother, ever in hope that she might provide them with a scaling ladder for the slippery slopes on which they stood—on the lowest levels of those Olympian heights inhabited by Sadie Matthews and the great names round her. The critics, composers and musical theorists clustered round Norman, either in hope of appeasing him and quenching his malicious fire, or of displaying such venom themselves that he would invite them to contribute to his magazine. Felix had hitherto been my mother's trump card. He was used by her to ornament these parties. The singers were to (and actually did) sing his songs, the pianists to play his compositions for the piano. The publishers (and there was often one present) were to publish them, Norman to criticise them, and the Olympians to give them their blessing. An immense amount of food and drink was consumed on these occasions, for, with the exception of the publishers, Norman, and Sadie Matthews, no one seemed to have had a square meal for days or seen a drink stronger than tea. Yet Norman continued to sharpen his claws on my mother's musical gatherings; the Olympians, though they smiled indulgently, left the performance of Felix's music to the unknown younger artists, who, nervous in the presence of Great Names, fumbled or brazened their way (according to their temperaments) through the latest work Felix had produced, but added nothing to his fame or their own lustre, since they were rarely in a position to perform it in public.

And now, it appeared, Felix had decided to court Norman's approval. I was horribly curious, and, at the same time, my curiosity was mingled with confused impressions of these people round me, and with a secondary curiosity about them, about their reality, which I had never had before when I merely accepted them as part of the musical life I was to live. Lying on my sofa, I felt myself as isolated as if I were on a

desert island, while around me, sealing me off from the ordinary world, the solid world of Edward and Folliotts, was this sea of personalities, some genuine, many spurious, which my mother had collected about her, and about me. And although with one part of me I would gladly have leapt from my island and broken through the surrounding waves to the world beyond, that second self which still dominated me was at pains to make me feel at home upon it. Was not Felix a native, and how could I leave it if it was his world? It was at this point in my meditations that Erik returned.

I think she's going to, he crowed.

Going to what? I asked.

Get up a concert for us both.

This time I did not disclaim the idea quite so readily, for there was growing up in my mind a resolve. I must do something to help Felix, and how better could I help him than with my voice and my name? To be the singer who would introduce his songs to the public, this gave my languid ambition a fresh stimulus. I hated to see him waiting for Norman's opinion. To be dependent on such a man. No, I cried inwardly, it is on me that he shall depend. I will slave as never before. I will dedicate my voice to him. Erik sat beside me, with eager face, and no less eagerly I clasped his hand.

Good, I said, I am so glad.

Erik's mouth opened in astonishment. Then he raised my hand to his lips and kissed it.

It's a bargain, then? he whispered.

Yes, I answered recklessly. If it will get me on the concert platform quicker, I'll do it.

His face fell a little.

Is ambition your only prompter? he asked. I looked at the tough, magisterial faces of the Olympians gathered round Sadie Matthews.

Yes, I said, with all the hardihood I could muster. And it's your only prompter too, Erik, if you're honest with yourself.

He shrugged his fat shoulders.

Oh, well, he said, grinning. Oh, well.

I liked him at that moment. He was an honest little man as singers go. Then he turned my hand over and tickled the palm.

Maybe we can have some fun on the side, all the same, he suggested.

No, we can't, I retorted. From now on, I'm going to live for my work.

That night, when the guests had gone and Felix, without a word to me, had departed upstairs, I told my mother that it was imperative that I start my singing lessons again as soon as possible, and with a really good teacher.

Why, Lise, she said, I'm glad to find you so eager. I was worried about you, darling. All these weeks and no practice. And I've been thinking a lot about you while I've been away. Wondering sometimes whether you've the temperament——

Angrily I interrupted her.

Of course I've the temperament! I cried.

She looked at me thoughtfully.

You've changed, Lise, during these weeks.

Perhaps I have, I said defensively.

Has Erik told you about this suggestion of a joint recital?

Of course he's told me. I've been seeing a lot of Erik.

Seeing a lot of Erik? Have you, darling?

My mother looked at me with a new interest.

I believe he finds you rather attractive, Lise. You—won't forget that he's rather small fry, will you?

No, Mother, I won't forget.

You say you've been seeing a lot of him?

Yes.

How much, darling, exactly?

Oh, well, he's been round here quite a lot.

Lise, we don't often have heart to heart talks, do we?

No, I said, loathing this one, but determined to go through with it for the sake of the cause.

You don't know how glad I am to see you—opening out

like this. Developing, my dear, becoming more a woman of the world.

My mother was plainly embarrassed. I knew what she meant. I was at last showing signs of that bohemianism which she so highly valued. She became confidential.

Your father, she began. You know we loved each other deeply?

I made no reply.

We did. He was the most wonderful husband and—and— (I think she was going to say father, but even mother's self-deception faltered at this and she changed the sentence) what was I going to say? I hardly know how to put it, but, Lise, now you're so much more mature, you should understand it better. He liked to flirt, you know. Oh, he was never faithless to me in his heart, and I just forgave his peccadilloes, but he certainly was amorous.

She said the word with satisfaction and watched my face to see how I took it. I found it difficult to maintain my pose. I had not reckoned on my father being brought into this talk.

I shall always admire him, I stammered.

Of course, my mother answered smoothly. Why shouldn't you? These things are part and parcel of the artistic temperament. The emotions are so volatile, so generous. That's why, in your case, I sometimes wondered . . . you seemed so cold, Lise dear. But you and Erik—how can I put this? Darling child, I don't want to be in your way. It's not easy for a daughter to live with a mother, is it? I wonder if you might like a little flat of your own?

Oh, no, I cried, anxiously. No, let me stay here, mother.

Her probing finger was dangerously near that vulnerable spot where, were I once touched too closely, I should cry out. As when one goes to a doctor, conscious only of some indefinable condition of unwellness, and winces as he presses relentlessly the tender spots, but is incapable of making an intelligible answer to his questions, awaiting

rather his expert knowledge which will pinpoint the pain, so I could say nothing more, but only await the pressure which would move gently but firmly over the skin of my emotions till it touched the sensitive, secret nerve, and I knew I must cry out: Felix!

But my mother, unlike a doctor, had no scientific interest in evoking from me the response which would have given her the truth. Her aim was entirely different, to utilise my emotional awakening for her own purposes.

Are you sure you would not like your independence, Lise? she asked, almost wistfully.

No, no! I cried, panic-stricken, foreseeing in it not independence but deprivation of all I most desired.

No, please, mother, I want to stay here.

My mother looked disappointed, and rather irritably she kissed me good night and we went to bed.

To be separated from Felix? My whole being was in pain at the threat, yet I hardly knew of what I should be deprived. I was not very conscious of Felix as a person. I knew little about him, and his curious, rather withdrawn personality eluded me. I was aware only of the burning pit within me, which flared up every time he approached. As a person, I think Edward had a larger share in my thoughts. I was, rightly, convinced that of the two Edward was far the better man and I felt for him a tenderness and trust that I never felt for Felix. But for Edward there was no pit burning in my vitals. I was sure therefore that I did not love him and continued to love Felix. Since love which is not fed with fuel from the two parties concerned merely reaches out and licks a fiery tongue around whatever it can reach, I soon found that nothing of my concerns could be kept untouched. When I awoke, it was only to a burning hope that today would grant me the opportunity to speak with him alone; when I ate my breakfast, every word which my mother said was flung into the fiery furnace.

I really must see about getting the new domestics today. (The embers glowed expectantly with a pleasing, steady heat.)

And you must come with me, Lise. It's time you learnt about these things. (Up went the flames into a roar and I could hardly control myself for the pain I suffered. My mother was going out. I could have been alone with Felix, but, no, I had to accompany her.)

I was dragged about, shopping for winter clothes, buying food, cooking it (more than time you acquired the domestic arts). Days went by during which I saw Felix only at meals and not always then, for he seemed to go out for many of them. My mother was beginning to adopt towards him a hard, bright tone, and words that often seemed designed to wound him. I could not understand why she had changed so much towards him. So deep was my longing to talk about him to somebody that one evening, after dinner, I said to her with a cold stillness of demeanour that disguised a boiling eruption within me:

Why are you sometimes so unkind to Felix? Don't you like him any more?

Of course I like him. (She put the word carefully into inverted commas, plain to hear.) I was not aware that I treated him any differently.

Oh, I think you do. You were horrid to him at lunch, Mother.

Well, perhaps I was. But I don't like his friends.

We're his friends.

He's taken up with Norman. It's very foolish of him.

But, Mother, you're always having Norman round here, and trying to get him to take an interest in Felix.

You don't quite understand the position, Lise darling. I—I'm disappointed in Felix.

I think his compositions marvellous.

My mother wiped her lips carefully with her handkerchief and said:

I've done nothing about a singing teacher, have I? I really must get down to it first thing tomorrow. We've been back over a week now.

Thus it was that at last my mother went out without me,

leaving me to cook the lunch (we were still servantless), and the moment I heard the front door close behind her I started to mount the stairs towards Felix's rooms. I had had this resolve in mind ever since they returned over a week ago. But it was in any case as instinctive and unconsidered as my love. I had no idea what I was going to say when I got there. I think I imagined that when at last we were really alone Felix would drop his reserve, and love, like a third soul, would spring between and take our hands and lead us to each other's hearts. If, as I climbed the stairs, I found myself assailed by doubts and half-formed thoughts, I managed to ignore them, urged on by the knowledge that only an hour or so was ours before my mother would return. I suppose I knocked at his door, but I must have turned the handle at almost the same moment. I certainly did not wait for a "come in". Felix was seated at the piano, doing nothing. He swung round on the stool and shouted angrily:

My God! It's you, Lise? Coming in like that! What the devil d'you want?

A few weeks ago I should have been scorched out of the room by the blast of such words, but my own fire was too fierce for me to feel any other flame. I ran to him and flung myself on his breast.

Felix! I half-sobbed, Felix! and I repeated his name over and over again, with a painful dry constriction of my throat and face muscles, for no tears came to relieve me.

Slowly, I could feel his stiff shoulder relax and without a word Felix put his arm round me, and his free hand caressed my hair and my face. I know now what the movements were and how I have myself performed them for a tearful overwrought child, but then I took them for the caresses of a lover. I kissed his hand in gratitude and closed my eyes with bliss. At last he said:

I'm sorry I shouted at you.

I don't mind, I've forgotten it, I cried recklessly.

I'm sorry all the same.

I never see you now, I said.

No, it's very difficult.

But why, Felix? Couldn't you come down more often? Couldn't we go out together?

No, Lise, I don't think so.

I was stubborn now. Having at last found this opportunity for speech, all the pent-up and bitter thoughts which had accumulated in me during the past weeks were seeking expression.

Felix, are you afraid of my mother?

Afraid?

He did not utter the word in a surprised or indignant tone, but rather as if he required time to answer it.

Yes. Why do you pretend so much? You pretend to be just another guest when really you're not. You live here. You're one of the family.

I don't think your mother regards me as one of the family.

Oh, I do. You're a kind of—of son to her.

Oh. Is that how it seems to you?

In a way, yes. D'you remember, long ago, when you were first back from Germany, you told me to regard you as a brother?

Did I? I don't remember.

Yes, you did. But I won't remember it if you don't.

I waited for him to speak, but he said nothing. We were standing a little apart now, but my arm was still round his shoulders. He removed it adroitly and sat down, but I was not to be shaken off. I knelt at his feet and, leaning against his knees, I said, with almost desperate earnestness:

Felix, I love you. Please love me a little. I thought you did and now I'm not so sure. What's happened between us?

He got up and walked away from me.

Nothing has happened, he said abruptly. Absolutely nothing. I haven't let it happen. Perhaps—I do love you in a way, but what can I do about it? Do you not understand how impossible the situation is?

You mean my mother wouldn't approve?

He looked down at me in silence. At last he said:

No. She would not approve. Listen, Lise. I am by no means certain that I have it in me to compose. Do you know I have never said that to any other person? I say it to you because you have the quality of—of innocence that acts as a kind of clarifying agent to one's words. I can deceive myself. I can deceive Norman—and your mother. But not you.

I was about to expostulate when he cut into my words almost savagely, shouting:

No! Don't say you think my compositions wonderful, marvellous, full of genius. Was that what you were going to say?

Yes, I whispered.

He sat down.

Well, stop thinking it, he said. I am sick of it.

Stunned, I could say nothing. He dropped into his chair again and I did the only thing that I could. I placed myself on the arm of it, and with a despairing gesture Felix turned to me and for a few moments we clung together, without words. Then he pushed me aside and got up.

We're not ruthless enough, you and I, for this game. If I were a stockbroker, now, or a nice, simple city clerk, you and I, Lise, could find our idyll in a suburban villa, and Sundays on the river, and we'd invite friends in for musical evenings. You would sing Roger Quilter and I would play Scriabin, and there would be a sufficient flavour of modernity about us to be thought rather daring.

Felix, I almost wept. Make it come true. Why shouldn't we be happy?

Because, my dear Lise, I am not a stockbroker nor a bank clerk. I am a would-be composer living on someone else's money. And you are a would-be singer destined for the artistic life. We could have a clandestine affair—extremely difficult to engineer, I may say, in this household, but—we are not going to have an affair. You are too innocent and I—though I am hardly innocent—I have, strangely enough, a few scruples. As I say, we are neither of us ruthless enough

to play a game of such colossal deception, and I doubt the possibility of happiness if we did.

Much of this, I only half-understood. I was immeasurably disturbed by the violence of my feelings, which were nearly choking me, and clouding my intelligence like smoke. I longed with acute pain for close physical contact with him, could not define to myself the turbulence which shook me and was the more aggravated by the mental confusion into which I was thrown by his guarded remarks.

I saw the clock and knew I must go. I had done nothing towards the lunch yet. I told him my mother would be back soon and he stiffened and let me slip to my feet.

Of course, he said. Of course. And I must get on with this. Norman is waiting for it.

He pointed to the music on the piano.

What is it? I asked eagerly. At once he was his scowling secretive self again.

Great things are expected of me, it seems, he sneered.

I stood behind him, loving every muscle on his neck, every hair on his head.

May I come up again? I asked.

Of course, he answered after a short pause, and without turning round.

I leaned over him and kissed the top of his head. He never moved, but I went down to the kitchen with the fire within me burning so fiercely that my whole frame was shaking.

The following week I started singing lessons again, this time with an Italian teacher. She was horrified at my voice production, and set me back to the beginning again. She was enormously fat and smelt of aniseed, but her own voice had quality and perhaps if she had taught me from the start I might by sheer technique have achieved a career as a singer. I worked for her with an enthusiasm I had not felt before. She was pleased with me sometimes and used then to offer me little glasses of *anisado* at the end of the lessons. But it was not for her I worked. It was for Felix. Nor did I let

my mother forget her promise about the joint recital with Erik. When I thought of appearing on a public platform I went sick in the stomach, but I had made my resolve, and I hoped that, with Erik on the platform beside me, I should manage it. I dreamed of this concert by day and night. But how different were my dreams from those which most young singers would have entertained. The thought of applause did not quicken my pulse, and I dreaded the criticisms which would appear in the press. I was still in that stage of passion when we imagine the beloved trapped in a burning house and it is through our efforts and ours alone that rescue is effected. Or we imagine him in the hands of the enemy and go through fire and torture for his sake, perhaps die in his arms. If I can claim any originality at all, it is solely that my romantic dreams took the somewhat unusual direction of bringing my lover some musical recognition instead of embroiling him in the more commonplace burnings and shipwrecks, railway accidents, imprisonments or tortures. Anyone with a firmer grasp of reality, with a little experience or at least with a more adult attitude to their experience, would have found it impossible to live for several months on the romantic delusions which I harboured. They would have forced an issue and provoked a direct response one way or the other. But I, with a kind of passionate innocence, was quite content to take the shadow for the substance, and indeed, by a curious juxtaposition of fact and fiction, was far more realistic in my relations with Erik.

I saw a good deal more of Erik than I wanted to, yet, in a way, I grew rather attached to him. I found that, once he was allowed to kiss me, he did not make too many demands on me and I hardly noticed his caresses. This was part of the detachment of which I have spoken. That part of me which had responded so dangerously to Erik before was now, as it were, dedicated to Felix, and I remained so impervious to Erik's advances that he got bored after a time and we settled down into an amicable and not unsatisfactory relationship.

He seemed, after the initial irritation of not getting what he wanted, to enjoy my company, and he certainly enjoyed and needed the good food and warmth which my mother's house provided, for he was absolutely penniless. He obtained work intermittently, but he seemed perpetually in debt. He took any job that was offered him, a thing which at first I found strange. I could not understand how he could, as I put it, prostitute his art by singing in a cinema. He was during the winter singing the title song of a film called *Sands of Love* and went with it from cinema to cinema all round London and the suburbs. At intervals throughout the film (particularly when a new reel was being fitted into the projector) the spotlight was switched on and Erik appeared at the side of the stage, clad in a grey dress suit of watered silk, with a deep red artificial flower in his buttonhole. Here he stood and sang with a soulfulness I found almost unbearable:

My love is wide as the sands, dear,  
And infinite as the sea,  
My heart is in your hands, dear,  
Oh, keep it safely for me.  
As long as the stars are above,  
Don't let your heart have a doubt,  
We'll travel the golden sands of love,  
And those sands will never run out.

Erik adored this song and insisted on singing it with lachrymose emphasis at every party my mother invited him to. It was his only way of exonerating his artistic conscience, to sing this song in a deliberately exaggerated fashion for other artists to laugh at. But I hated to see him exhibiting himself in this way and refusing to sing Schubert, because, he said, it would spoil his style for the *Sands of Love*. I believe he was paid thirty shillings a week for singing this song every evening. It was almost his only income that winter. We dis-

cussed from time to time what we were going to sing at the concert which was now provisionally fixed for April. But we never seemed to get much nearer a decision. This was largely my fault, for I was unwilling to commit myself until I knew what Felix wanted me to sing, and I could not induce him to give me anything.

As Felix once said, my mother expected returns, yet, in the case of Felix himself, she seemed uncharacteristically moderate in her expectations. I thought he had some hold upon her which kept a bearing-rein on her usually impetuous craving for tangible results. Yes, I saw that this was so, yet I never, till it was too late, drew the inference that a more sophisticated girl would have drawn. For one thing, though I was forced to accept the blatant and rather painstaking immorality of Norman and Dulcie, and the more natural and homely lasciviousness of Erik, I would never have attributed to my own mother any such impulses. If my thoughts had run in this direction (which they did not) I suppose I should have voted her too old, yet she was only forty-six. To me, widowhood was as respectable an insurance against immorality as marriage, and my own presence in the house a more valuable asset still. But in any case my mind had been set on quite another course from the very start by Felix's assertion that I must regard him as a brother. Though I had found this impossible, the idea coloured my thoughts and I did perceive in my mother's treatment of him something maternal and possessive which I was far from thinking an aspect of sexual love.

One evening he came down to our room when my mother happened to be downstairs talking to the cook—having a scene with cook, might be a truer way of describing it. He looked very white and was put out that my mother was not there.

How's the singing? he asked abruptly.

I was nervous.

I think it's getting on, I answered. But Mother was rather critical when she heard my lesson today.

*Heard your lesson?* Oh, God, at least she doesn't stand over me when I am composing, he burst out. There is one thing your mother has no room for—doubts. Do you ever have doubts, Lise?

About my singing?

What else? Of course, about your singing.

The question reminded me uncomfortably of Edward, but I did not feel the same obligation to defend myself to Felix.

Yes, I suppose so, I replied. I know I'm a poor musician and I—I do have doubts.

Bravely spoken! Do you say that to your mother?

No, I don't.

It's necessary to let the doubt out of oneself sometimes, like an abscess, said Felix morosely. It collects in one's system and poisons one if it can't have an outlet.

You don't need to have doubts, I said boldly.

He turned on me a stare which warned me off as dangerously as an electric fence.

Will your mother be long? he asked.

Hurt that the moment of intimacy had passed so rapidly, I told him, sulkily, that she was having a row with the cook. Felix laughed.

I wish I were Cook, he said. I'm spoiling for a row. I'd have one with you if you weren't so—so defenceless, my little Lise. But a row is no satisfaction if one party hasn't a weapon.

At that moment my mother was heard coming up the stairs, and Felix rose to his feet as if he were indeed contemplating a duel with her and putting himself in an attitude of readiness.

My mother's face was flushed. She swept into the room, and started to speak before she had seen Felix.

That cook will have to go. Lise, tell me, have you heard her say anything——

My mother saw Felix and stopped abruptly. For a moment she looked—a rare thing—embarrassed. Thinking to be helpful, I said:

What were you asking, Mother? About Cook?

It doesn't matter, said my mother calmly. She shall go. Tomorrow. I detest her cooking.

How very uncomfortable for you, said Felix, acidly.

For you, too, retorted my mother.

Felix raised his eyebrows and said with deliberate malice:

This seems opportune. I think of going myself.

My mother stared at him. She seemed to be trying to re-orientate herself. Felix went on speaking:

Cook no longer gives satisfaction. She goes. Felix also no longer gives satisfaction. He goes, too—before he's given the sack.

My mother's expression changed. It was possible to see her putting aside her anger with Cook almost as if it were a garment, and dressing herself in something more suitable.

What's happened, Felix? she asked in a very ordinary, casual tone of voice. Is it this big work of yours, the opera? Let me come upstairs and hear some of it.

There's nothing to hear, answered Felix, and took a deep breath. There is something, though, that you must hear, that has to be said.

Need it be said now? I'm rather tired and it's late, said my mother, glancing at me.

Oh, Lise can be in on this secret, said Felix, but the emphasis was fatal to him. My mother held out her hand to him.

Do give me a cigarette, dear, absurd Felix, she said.

I could sense growing up round them like a palisade the walls of their exclusiveness. I made an effort to enter their world.

Oh, Mother! I cried. Can't you see how difficult it is for—for us always to be responsive?

What do you mean, Lise?

I floundered on, trying to force my foot into the enclosure, by claiming alliance with Felix.

Well, you are always so certain that Felix is going to be a great composer and that I am going to be a good singer. You won't allow us any doubts, but—but we don't always feel that certainty ourselves.

As though from an upper window my mother surveyed me.

Lise, my darling child. You've taken what I said this morning too much to heart.

Oh, no, I answered. It's not only me. It's Felix.

Felix? said my mother and looked at him as though she had only just noticed he was in the room and certainly never connected the two of us together. But I've said nothing about Felix's work.

Adroitly, she had set the conversation at cross-purposes and I was incapable of keeping it on a direct course.

We all seem upset, cried my mother gaily. What we need is some coffee and brandy. And if it's the last thing Violet does, she can get it for us. Ring the bell for her, Felix. Now, you two must stand by me. Why, (my mother dropped her voice to a whisper) she might come upstairs with the poker in her hand.

Thus were we rallied. Thus were we drawn into an artificial bond, and my mother and Felix finished the evening very convivially by recalling the hardships they had endured during the war, and telling each other what a wonder it was they had survived it.

I was groomed relentlessly during this winter for the concert. Madame Bianchelli had been displaced after only four weeks by another teacher, a German again, Herr Finkel. Herr Finkel was abominably poor, and had an obsequious and grateful attitude towards me, provoked by the fact that I was his bread-and-butter. I learned afterwards that Madame Bianchelli had flatly refused to allow me to take part in any concert in April, but Herr Finkel had no such scruples. What my mother wanted he was only too anxious to do, and though he shook his head over me and groaned, *Oh mein Gott, only tree mont'*, or simply, *Dis concert—oh, Himmel!*

he did not attempt to frustrate my mother's plans. Conscious perhaps of her own lack of taste and knowledge, she tried to enlist the help of Felix in preparing me artistically for the great event. But he was surly. I know nothing of singing, nothing whatever, he would mutter. My mother then invited Erik to take over, which he was only too delighted to do, and he actually did teach me things which I could never have learnt from my mother or Herr Finkel. He taught me to sink on to my feet in such a way that I seemed to be growing on the floor—like Antaeus, he said and, puzzled, I asked him what he meant. He told me the story of the Greek giant whose strength came from the earth and I have never forgotten it, for it seems to me to have a deep significance, far beyond what Erik gave it.

After one of these sessions, when my mother had gone downstairs, he turned suddenly to me and said:

You don't really want to sing in this concert, do you, Lise?

I knew that it was true but I could not bear to admit it.

Go on, Lise, be honest with me, at least. Ah, what a pity it is! There are you, with a good instrument (even if it has been mauled about unmercifully) and not a grain of artistic feeling in you, and here am I, an artist every inch, and a poor damn ugly little man with a second-rate voice.

I stared at him, horrified at this piece of self-exposure.

Oh, no! I cried. It's not like that a bit. You've a lovely voice.

My dear Lise, he retorted with some asperity, which dignified his face. You are about as ignorant as your mother on these subjects. But I love you all the same.

He kissed me fondly. I think I came near at that moment to loving him. I certainly forgave him the things which had offended me at first, his greed, his sensuality. I think he was the first human being I ever really understood, which is very different from saying that he was the first human being who understood me.

During this winter, when to the outside world I must have presented a typical picture of the earnest music student, endlessly practising, endlessly discussing technique and matters of musical interpretation with singers who came to the house; when my mother's interest appeared to centre on my career and few people were invited to the house without hearing something of the concert to be performed in May; when printers' proofs of the notice lay about for all to see, amended in red chalk by my mother—with all this, it was my inner life which held the only true importance for me. The concert preparation was only undertaken by me in a kind of fierce desperation bred of my inner resolve to help Felix. The only moments of happiness I had were those I spent in his room and they were of a happiness shot through with veins of misery as sharp as acid. He accepted it now as the rule that whenever my mother was out of the way I should come up the stairs to his room. He treated me with a mixture of boredom and tenderness, which kept my feelings in perpetual exacerbation. Over and over again I was on the point of telling him that all I was doing was for him, and then, I imagined, he would confess that all he was doing—the sheets of scrawled music paper, the touting to Norman, the forbearance with my mother—all this was for me, and we should then live happily ever after, having performed for each other the sacrifice necessary for those we love. Yet I did not tell him. Perhaps some inner fear that his response would not be all I hoped held me back.

I read into every kiss he gave me and every tender word a wealth of concealed feeling which he dared not offer me yet, and all he said I treasured up and rehearsed again afterwards, when I was alone at night, spelling out of it meanings which I was convinced were hidden therein. If it should be thought that I might have learned from Erik that men do not normally behave like this, I can only say that the reverse is true. It was precisely because I had experienced in Erik the naked sensuality and greed of the male that I misinterpreted Felix so readily. If I craved for his caresses, it was because I

regarded them as a sure outward manifestation of an inner passion. Our physical union was not to be an end in itself, as it was with Erik, but the crown of our spiritual relationship. I even thought that Felix desired me far more strongly than he would confess, and felt a humble gratitude towards him that he held back from more intimate love-making; thought him indeed noble beyond words that he thus reined in his masculine nature till the time should come when our love could be openly avowed.

So the cold months went by, November into December, and we had a very German Christmas, organised by my mother, with holly wreaths, and much carol-singing and weeping on the part of the nostalgic Germans present. December stiffened into a bitterly cold, foggy January, when I lost my voice for a week, and lay back in bed in a delicious lethargy, and my dream of Felix was forgotten in the ecstasy of realisation that I might never have to mount that concert platform. But I got over it, and soon recovered my capacity for hard work, fortified by an evening with Felix when my mother was being taken to a concert by one of my father's old friends.

Felix and I sat in the firelight in his room, I on the rug, and he in the chair, and I sat back against his knees and imagined how it would always be thus, once we were married. He told me a little of the opera on which he was working.

It is a tract for the times, he said, with a kind of bitter satisfaction. Curiously enough, I am not interested in the times. I detest them. But I am sure that Norman is right. I have been an escapist. Perhaps those four years of internment may account for it. You remember that song I wrote you?

Yes, I said, and I want some time to sing it with you playing the accompaniment. We never have, you know.

We never shall, he said sourly. I want to destroy it.

Destroy it?

Yes, burn it, Lise. It's no good. When I wrote that song I was in a mood of romantic sickliness. I thought I—— He

paused. I could not have ended his sentence for him. Perhaps some other woman could have done. But I waited, hardly breathing, listening for his next words.

Never mind, he said abruptly. I allowed myself to submit to other influences. Destroy it.

No, I said, I could never do that. But I'll never sing it in public, if you don't want me to.

Sing it in public? My God! I should hope not.

Then write me another. One that I *can* sing in public.

No, I can't do that. I must devote myself to this opera.

Who has written the libretto?

It has none.

But, Felix, how can one sing it?

There is no singing in it in the ordinary sense.

Oh.

I felt rather disheartened for a moment. Then I asked him how he was going to get it performed as an opera if there was no singing in it.

Oh! he cried impatiently. There will be singers, of course, but they will have to rid themselves of their prejudices and do with their voices most of the things their singing masters tell them not to.

I stored up this piece of information. I did not quite see what singers Felix was going to find to give up their prejudices, which appeared to me more ineradicable in the case of singers than of any other musicians. It did however dawn on me that if Felix needed a new kind of singing, I, not yet hardened into prejudices, was just the singer for him. I did not tell him this at first. I chewed over the idea to myself during nearly all January, and then in February I realised that I must speak about it, for Erik was wanting to map out the programme as soon as possible and get to work on it in detail. When I mooted the idea to Erik that we should present to the public a few excerpts from Felix's new opera, Erik expressed a violent distaste for the idea.

Oh, my God, he groaned. It'll ruin the concert.

I was indignant.

You know nothing about it, I cried.

Do you?—he retorted. Have you heard any of it?

Well, no, I admitted. Indeed, no one, as far as I knew, had heard a note of this opera. Occasionally outbursts of extraordinary sound were heard from Felix's piano, but these were not frequent.

From what I gather from Norman, said Erik, and Norman's precious friends, the thing will be unsingable anyway.

It will be singable by people prepared to learn new methods, I said pompously, and Erik stared at me.

We've got to move with the times, I went on. Music can't just go on being a pastiche of what's been done before. Composers like Felix are brave enough to strike out in new directions and it's going to be a poor thing if the interpretative artists like us are going to say we'd rather stick to the past. I'd like to know what would have happened to Beethoven or Wagner if people had said that.

Dear me, said Erik, amused. You must have been reading Norman's latest editorial. So that's the way of the world, is it? I never heard such poppycock. Y'know, he went on wistfully, if I could get you in bed, just for five little minutes, you wouldn't have any of these silly ideas.

I said nothing. Remarks like this held no terror for me now.

Erik sighed. No, he said. It might take longer than five minutes.

Oh, be quiet, Erik, I said, exasperated by his facetiousness. I can't even shock you now, he said ruefully.

No, you can't. This concert's serious and we ought to discuss it seriously. You can keep your lewd remarks for other girls. We're on a business footing.

Oh, Lise, Lise, would that we were not, he moaned and tried to put his head on my shoulder. But I was not in the mood to indulge his amorous trifling. I pushed him away and he departed soon after in a huff.

I found, however, a strong supporter in my mother. She said it would be a splendid thing to ally ourselves with the

new movement in music; that she had been trying for a long time to persuade Felix to throw in his lot with Norman. In view of earlier remarks of hers, this might have come as rather a surprise to me, but my mother was always led by expediency rather than principle and never stuck at a *volte-face*.

Norman can be such a help to us, she said complacently.

But, I objected, he might be a hindrance if other critics dislike his ideas.

Of course his ideas are disliked, darling. One of the best ways of testing the genuineness of an idea is to see how much it is disliked. The more people cold-shoulder it, the better you can be sure it is.

I thought there might be a flaw in this reasoning, but I was not quick enough to put my finger on it. In any case I was prejudiced by my desire to help Felix. Erik was bullied by my mother into accepting the idea of some number from the opera to form one item in the programme, and the question then arose of what else we should sing. My mother insisted on an all-operatic programme and chose virtually the whole of it, the items being in every case from some opera in which my father had sung. She could hardly have chosen anything else, for her knowledge of music was limited to this one sphere. She made great play with the fact that Felix's *scena* must be part of an all-operatic programme. Erik muttered naughtily that it would make a better appearance between a power station and the engine-room of a battleship, and my mother laughed at him and said she did not know how anyone could live without a sense of humour. Even I knew my mother well enough to understand that she had none herself, so we all three of us were able to laugh unaffectedly and for quite different reasons, which was just as well, for otherwise we might have quarrelled over the programme. At last it was settled, though Felix had not yet produced the *scena*, and my mother came to see Herr Finkel about it. He groaned when he saw the items I had to sing.

Oh, *Gott im Himmel*, he sighed. And I haf to teach you dese tings? Vat a murder of de innocents!

Whether he meant by the latter the composers or Erik and myself I had no means of knowing. With a subservience to my mother which I found embarrassing, he agreed to do his best for me, after first making with great formality a statement to the effect that I was not ready to sing in a concert at all. I am certain that my mother knew this. She had, after all, heard some of the finest opera singers in the world, and she cannot have been utterly deaf to the broader difference between them and myself. But she was greedy for publicity. She was starved for the delights of the concert hall, the applause, the bouquets, the congratulations—everything which she had enjoyed vicariously at my father's side, and had missed now for some six years. She took to coming with me to Herr Finkel's house to listen to my lessons, a proceeding which both he and I found very trying. Mercifully she did not attempt to advise Herr Finkel, but she did comment and criticise endlessly on lines something like this:

Can nothing be done about the breathing there, Herr Finkel? Such a gasp of breath. Of course, I know nothing of the technique of breathing. I only know it's very ugly to hear the intake half across the J. U.

And Herr Finkel would wring his hands and mutter, Vat for do I do dis? And my mother would retort brightly, For my money, Herr Finkel, for money. We all work for money. And very glad I am to provide you with a pupil.

For Herr Finkel would be silent, for he had few pupils and none who paid so well as my mother. She paid him more-over quite regularly. I think she was a little frightened of a repetition of the Rosenberg affair, which might have been disastrous just before the concert.

My mother asked Felix more than once to produce the *scena*, but the weeks went by and March came and he still had not given it to us. I saw very little of him during February, for the weather was bad and my mother went out seldom. More than once I went up to his room, on the

pretext of asking him for the music, but my mother was in the house and I did not like to stay too long. Curiously enough, it was on these occasions that he seemed most unwilling to let me go.

Stay with me, Lise, he said, on the third occasion, and held me fast between his knees.

I can't, Felix. Mother is downstairs.

Mother is downstairs, he mimicked me. And what difference does that make?

She would wonder why I was up here so long.

Why don't you tell her?

What could I tell her, Felix?

Tell her we are having an affair.

Will it be believed when I say that I took those words at their face value? I did, and my heart burnt my ribs in the heat of its pride and joy.

Go on, he pressed. Tell her that. It would be good for her.

But I could not have told her. And I went downstairs more disturbed than I had ever been. Disturbed, not by the cruelty of his game with me, which I did not understand to be a game, but by the lack of *rapprochement* between my mother and myself which made it impossible that I should ever tell her what was so near to my heart. If it seems strange that I should have had such an unrealistic attitude to life, let me say in my defence that most of those with whom I lived in contact supported themselves by equally fatuous delusions, so that the air was thick with fantasy, or perhaps it would be truer to say that we all of us saw each other and our lives through a glass, opaque indeed, but also as brittle as our own artificiality. It wanted but a little to break it to bits and bring us face to face with the facts, so that most of us tended to stand well back to avoid getting shattered by a chance blow from life itself. The one person who, the more I knew of him, seemed to possess a genuine nature of his own, unaffected and unartificial, was Erik. The extraordinary thing about it was that he reminded me so much of Edward,

yet no two men could have been more dissimilar. Long afterwards, when Erik had gone out of my life completely, I rationalised the curious connection between them which he and Edward had possessed in my mind, and found that it was not their character or appearances or ideas which touched at any point. It was that each of them struck in me myself the same chord. I imagined myself a stringed instrument, from which most people obtained only a limited and monotonous response. My mother for instance had a command only over a few notes, and those very thin ones. Felix too, I see now, though he touched the deepest notes in my register, touched only a few, but they were very vibrant ones, and set up a series of harmonics which disturbed the whole gamut. Norman touched others and set them jarring. But both Edward and Erik touched many of the same notes, warm, tuneful, well-tempered notes. I have never forgotten Erik. If I met him now, we should talk as easily as we did ten years ago.

After a while Erik suggested coming with me to my singing lesson to practise the duets. I found this very tiring and rather disturbing. Somehow when my mother was there, although she could be a nuisance, I did not find her presence put me off. I used to feel for Herr Finkel and we drew a little nearer in understanding, which helped me to sing as he was trying to make me do. But when Erik came, I found myself singing worse than I had done for weeks. Erik seemed so completely professional that I felt a bungling amateur beside him. He *was*, in fact, highly professional, which enabled him to get away with what was not a remarkably good voice. His sense of style was so accurate and his technique so excellent that he was able to give satisfactory renderings of almost any type of music, yet the voice itself was reedy and not very powerful, and his appearance was atrocious. When we sang together I was at once conscious of my mediocrity though I knew that I had a far better instrument than he had. I loathed these duets, for I could feel acutely that Herr Finkel and Erik were drawn together in a kind of artistic alliance

into which I would have so gladly entered had I had it in me, but from which I was excluded quite as irrevocably as if I were a negro at the portals of an English club.

After the second of these rehearsals my mother wanted to do some shopping, so Erik and I walked home together. Herr Finkel lived in Silchester Square. Once a respectable middle-class district, built when it was fashionable to live amid the large gardens of the riverside estates, it had now become almost a slum and the houses were dirty and dilapidated. When Erik and I came out into the street it was into darkness, although it was only half-past four. There were hardly any lights in the square, and the dimly seen yellowing pillars and balustrades of the houses looked like rows of rotten teeth. I shivered and Erik took my arm.

We'll walk home, he said. Partly to save a bus fare and partly because I want to ask you something.

But he did not ask me the question at once. We went down to the end of the square and out on to the embankment. To our right lay the warehouses, but on the left the trees ran along the river's edge, a network of empty branches in the lamplight.

What were you going to ask me? I said.

Why do you go on with this? said Erik.

With what?

Singing.

It's my career.

You don't need a career.

I might some day.

In that case you'd better train yourself as a shorthand typist.

I suppose I should, I answered dismally.

Well, then, why go on with something you hate?

I don't hate it, Erik, I interrupted defensively.

But do you enjoy it? Do you love it passionately? Is it meat and drink to you? And husband and children?

He paused and looked full at me as we passed under a lamp. I turned my face away.

Lise, I love you. There's something that endears you to me, but, my God, it isn't your singing. My dear girl, you are not unscrupulous enough to be a singer. With a name like yours, and a mother like yours, why, I'd be in neon signs in every concert house in Europe by now. But you don't make use of your name.

I'd rather get somewhere by my own merits. After all I seem to have quite a good voice.

Merits? said Erik scornfully. Oh, my darling Lise! Merits! Does anyone ever get anywhere by merits? Besides—but I won't say that. No, you ought to be exploiting your mother, and, instead, she is exploiting you.

Exploiting me?

Certainly. She wants your fame.

Well, she can have it as far as I am concerned. I don't particularly want fame.

Erik emitted something very like a howl.

You are going through with this simply to give your mother the pleasure of showing you off?

In my extreme loneliness, Erik seemed to possess positive virtues as a confidant. I had, after all, no women friends to talk to, for the women who came to the house were not my friends. They were most of them hunters of some sort or another. So I took my courage in my hands and said to Erik:

I want to tell you something. It will help me to tell you. I'm doing this concert for the sake of Felix.

Of Felix? repeated Erik incredulously.

Yes. He—he needs the fame more than I do. I know that my name will be a draw. It was my idea that we should do a *scena* from his opera——

Which we haven't set eyes on yet, interposed Erik.

I know, but he'll give it to us soon. He—he's very busy.

Oh damn the *scena*! Lise, are you in love with Felix?

I couldn't speak. I turned to Erik and buried my face in his coat. I was too young to understand my own despair. Erik comforted me with that extreme tenderness which was

the obverse of his masculine sensuality. We stood leaning against the cold parapet, above the river, and passers-by took us for a pair of lovers. When I had recovered sufficiently, we walked on towards Pimlico, briskly and without speaking. The moment of confidence was over.

When I got home, there was a letter from Edward.

I see you are giving a concert, he wrote [no reproaches that I had not let him know]. And of course I shall come to hear you. My mother wants to come too and we shall stay the night in London. Will you be too tired the following day to have lunch with us?

I wrote back at once to say how glad I was that he was coming, that I hoped he would come round to the artists' room afterwards as I should not be able to come to lunch the following day owing to a previous engagement. I don't know why I wrote that, except that I had a premonition that I could never face Edward in the cold light of day after the concert was over. In the artists' room I should be protected by the atmosphere in which he would find it difficult to breathe. I went out and posted the letter with a feeling that I had burned my boats where Edward was concerned, that I had set my face firmly towards a singer's future.

Next day Felix came into our sitting-room soon after breakfast, looking extremely pale.

Are the programmes printed? he asked.

I sent back the proofs last week, answered my mother, looking at him with surprise.

Felix lit a cigarette and walked across to the window. Outside, a hard wind was blowing, and as he sent out a spiral of smoke from his nostrils it wafted across the room towards us in the draught, and obscured his face from our eyes.

I want to withdraw my *scena*, he said.

Withdraw it? asked my mother, getting up and going over to him.

I'm not satisfied with it, went on Felix.

But it's in the programme now.

I'm afraid we shall have to recall them and get the printers to put in something else.

Felix, it's far too late. You told me it would be ready next week, at latest. It's bad enough for Erik and Lise to have to learn it at the last minute like this.

If it goes in, then it must go in under Norman's name.

Don't be ridiculous. How can it? You wrote it.

He guided my pen.

I don't believe it. You're not so weak as that.

So weak as that? repeated Felix quickly.

Not weak at all, said my mother. This is your greatest work and you throw it up just because of some temporary depression about it. You're tired, my dear.

*I am tired.*

Well, then. I know you artists. You wear yourselves out and then the demons of self-criticism attack you. My husband was just the same. After his super best performances he was often more dissatisfied and depressed than at any other time.

I am not—your husband, said Felix. I am a lesser man.

No, not lesser, said my mother, turning away. I think she had forgotten I was still in the room, by the fire, behind them. Her back was towards me and Felix was looking past her shoulders directly at me.

Not lesser, she repeated slowly and dropped her voice still lower. A different man. A different talent.

I thought I had genius.

Yes, Felix, I think you have, but somehow—I cannot use the word too often.

No. It is like the word JAH, too sacred to be mentioned.

I don't know what you mean, I'm afraid. You're too clever for me, Felix.

That is not cleverness. It is religion. Strange as it may seem, I had a religious upbringing. I remember it sometimes.

He was still looking at me, but his face was a mask.

I want the *scena* withdrawn. And there are other things I want.

What are they, Felix? My mother was almost humble.

We'll discuss them some other time, said Felix abruptly and walked out of the room.

My mother shrugged her shoulders and came and sat down opposite to me. She looked at me thoughtfully.

Will you really—really have to withdraw the *scena*? I stammered.

My mother laughed. Her tone of voice altered—she was herself again.

Oh, my dear Lise, you don't know these composers. They suffer, and then they inflict their sufferings on others. It is our privilege to bear with them. But it is also our duty to prevent them from making fools of themselves and losing their opportunities. The artist is very unworldly. I really believe that if I had not been behind your father he would never have got farther than a German provincial opera house, for all his wonderful vocal powers. And Felix is the same. It will mean some hard work for me, but I shall persuade him. You will see.

No more was said, and two days later, when Erik was practising with me, my mother produced the *scena* and with it Felix and Norman. She and Norman drove Felix as though he were a horse before them to the piano, cajoling and coaxing. Felix was white round the nostrils and mouth, and very flushed on the cheek-bones. The parts were put in our hands and we read it through; that is to say, Erik read it through. He sang his part at an unrelieved *forte* and with, I believe, fair accuracy, for he was a brilliant reader. I lost my place over and over again and was prompted back to it by angry thumps on the piano from Felix or bawling by Erik, who seemed to find it possible to sing my part as well as his own. There were no words whatever, we sang on varying vowel sounds. The *scena* was headed: Meeting in the Square . . . Prostitute and City Toff.

I could see that it was clever stuff. The writing for the

tenor was slick, artificial and vulgar, that for the soprano (from what I could gather) was alternately whining and impudent. Norman was delighted. He grew really warm in enthusiasm and insisted on our going through it all again, while he made copious notes on the inside covers of my little old Zimmermann Beethoven.

I'll bring out an article on it, he said. It will come out just before the concert.

Felix said nothing. Norman liked his protégés to be grateful and he stood waiting, looking at Felix. Felix looked stony.

How splendid! cried my mother. Will you write the article yourself, Norman?

I don't think it quite merits that, said Norman spitefully, and Felix flushed. He got up and walked rapidly to the window. When he turned to speak, his face was dark against the light and I could not see its expression. The *scena* was in his hand and as he was speaking, he slowly tore it into small pieces which fell at his feet. Some of them lodged on his shoes like snowflakes.

Norman, he began, with enforced calm, you won't have to employ anyone to write up your notes into an article. The opera is finished. *Kaput*. Ho well I've taken you in. It was almost worth doing to see your enthusiasm. A wretched pastiche, a lot of damned humbug with not a note of music in it from start to finish—I even incorporated eleven bars from the *Appassionata* sonata, at one point, only they were played backwards, so you may be forgiven for not recognising them—a revolting hotchpotch—and Norman acclaims it. Wonderful, he cries and claps his hands. How easy it is to give you what you want, to give you *all* what you want.

He swept his glance savagely round the room as he stalked out, leaving an uneasy silence behind him. Norman looked sick, my mother was more genuinely distressed than I had ever seen her. There were tears in her eyes and her cheeks were very pale. Only Erik spoke.

A pity, he said suavely. I enjoyed singing that nonsense. I really feel I pulled something off.

You damned sychophant, shouted Norman. You were in the plot. You knew all about it from the first.

Don't be so angry, Norman. I knew nothing of it whatever.

Don't lie. You couldn't have sung it like that at first sight.

Now there, said Erik sorrowfully, you cut me to the quick. You flick me on the raw. Norman, he went on, almost pleading, Norman—give honour where honour is due, I was sight-reading it—cross my heart and wish I may die.

Oh, stop this idiocy, interrupted my mother. The concert is ruined, utterly ruined. We'll have to put in something else, and there's so little time. Perhaps it would be better to cancel it.

Far better, my dear Madame Reinhart, said Norman, assuming his deep, wise voice.

Erik looked suddenly across at me.

Lise and I will go and discuss the matter in the music-room, he said with dignity, and, going to the door, he held it open for me. I followed him, and once in the music-room, he turned the key in the lock and said:

I can't let this concert go, Lise. We must think of something else. I know you're hurt, but, Lise, stand by me. The concert means so much.

I said nothing.

It ought to be another dramatic *scena*, I suppose. It's a good enough idea.

I can't, Erik, I can't learn it in the time. I'm not good enough.

Erik took no notice.

It ought really to be something modern, but that's too difficult now, of course. Something eighteenth century, perhaps, something with a tune you can get hold of—that would be the thing. Mozart—you haven't the style (he interposed bluntly), but perhaps I could knock something into you.

I looked at him humbly. His appeal to me and the energy of his speech overcame my weakness.

I'll do my best, I said.

I knew I must stand by him. This concert meant more to Erik than to any of the other participants. For me, the heart had gone out of it all.

Erik selected the music and I did my best with it. I found it uphill work practising, and Herr Finkel groaned and uttered dismal German imprecations through his grey moustaches. My mother was irritable, goaded me, snapped at me sometimes, and then quickly begged my forgiveness and treated me to an almost maudlin display of maternal affection. I found her once in tears and she clung to my arm, and laying her wet eyes against the sleeve of my blouse, she whispered:

You're all I really care for, Lise, all, all—a statement which half touched me, half repelled me, so unnatural and grotesque did it seem.

Erik was a demon of energy and was the only person who made any headway with my attempts to learn the new work. He was immensely gratified with the posters which were now appearing on the hoardings, would take out press cuttings of the concert advertisements and I gloat over them lovingly, trying to infect me with a little of his own enthusiasm. But the nearer the concert came, the more certain I felt that it would end in fiasco.

The day after the first advertisement appeared in *The Times*, I had another letter from Edward. He told me he had bought tickets for himself and his mother and wished me luck for the performance. It was more than I could bear. I wrote back a passionate protest, imploring him not to come to the concert. I did not attempt to disguise my unhappiness. A few days later I had a note in return.

It was rather difficult to dissuade my mother, he wrote. In the end I showed her your letter. It was not a thing I would willingly do, but I found it was impossible to convey

to her its meaning in my own words, which, as you know, are always inadequate. She asks me to say that she will be thinking of you on the night of the concert—perhaps I should say, thinking of you specially, that night, for I believe she often thinks of you. As for me, I have to come up to London in any case. I shall come on the day before the concert. I shall be staying at the Portman Hotel. If there is anything I can do for you, you have only to let me know.

And Felix? During these last weeks he rarely appeared downstairs. He went out to restaurants for his meals and often did not return till late at night. Once he stayed away altogether for two nights and days and my mother was beside herself. So was I, and we spent the forty-eight hours trying to conceal our emotions from each other.

The sound of his piano was never heard. It was almost as though he were not living in the house any more. I was hardly ever able to go up and see him. I think I only went to his rooms twice in that month before the concert, for my mother was for ever in the house and I did not know what excuse to make to her that I was going up to see Felix. I tried to find pretexts.

Shall I take these letters up to Felix?

Good heavens, no, Lise! He always fetches his own post.

I think Felix rather wanted this parcel. I'll just run up with it. To be countered with—Nothing of the sort, Lise. I'll call him down.

But twice I did manage to escape and get up to Felix's room. On the first occasion he was sitting in an easy chair, looking at the advertisements in *The Times*.

Ah, he said, looking up when I came in. Does your mother want her *Times*? I borrowed it this morning, I'm afraid, when I went down for the post.

Oh, I said, startled. She wondered what had happened to it. She's just gone round to make a fuss at the newsagent's.

Felix laughed disagreeably.

There was a bill in today's copy (he picked up the news-agent's bill which was lying on the floor beside him). Account rendered £2. 11s. 4d. It says that if she does not pay it at once, steps will be taken. And she has gone round to complain that her copy of *The Times* has not come this morning. I should like to see the encounter. It would, I think, be diverting.

He pulled me on to his knee.

Mother's out, so Lise comes to see me, he said and compressed his lips. He looked at me almost cruelly. You have neglected me recently. Where have you been?

I've been practising terribly hard for the concert.

For the concert, eh? What concert?

His hands gripped my arms very hard. He was hurting me and I was scared of his strength.

The concert on May the sixth, I said breathlessly.

Oh, that? he answered contemptuously. Little Erik's benefit performance. I hoped you'd extricated yourself from that. What else prevents you from coming to see me, Lise?

I suppose my mother.

I've told you what to say—tell her we're having an affair.

But we're not, I said bitterly.

At once he gripped me more loosely.

Then we will, he said. His love-making gave me no pleasure. It half-frightened, half-revolted me. I felt I could not bear this hole-and-corner business much longer. Felix seemed another person, and this day in particular his attitude to me was totally lacking in any tenderness. It was as though he were trying to convince himself, to make use of me as a reinforcement against something or somebody else. It did not diminish my love for him, but it made me long for the earlier days, when shyness and a quality of worship in my love invested the affair with mystery and tenderness. We heard my mother come up to the front door.

Now go, ordered Felix. Go and tell her what we have been doing. Go and tell her I have been making love to you, Lise. Then, as I hesitated, he suddenly caught my hand and kissed it.

No, he said abruptly. Don't say it. Let us keep something out of all this, something for ourselves.

And he looked at me with that strange look which pierced me through and through and enslaved me afresh. We were back on the old footing. The mystery was there, the secrecy, the inner bond.

Erik came in later on and we rehearsed. I don't think I ever sang so well as I did that afternoon. Erik was delighted and insisted on taking me out to tea afterwards.

Your mother gave me the money, he confided as we left the house. So, you see, I am really treating you.

I was sufficiently elevated in spirits to be amused.

I can't see how, if Mother put up the money, I protested.

Economics are your weak point, Erik said patiently. I will explain. Your mother gives me five shillings to take you out to tea. I need that five shillings to pay my laundry—you may have noticed that my shirt is regrettably dirty. My generous instincts, however, have overcome me, and I take you out to tea instead. Now tell me why you sang so well today, Lise.

I suppose I feel happy.

Good, then we shall have a delightful tea.

We did, as it happens, have a very delightful tea. Erik was at his best, partly because he was feeling conscious of inner virtue and that always gave him confidence and made him less assertive. He had one trait very uncommon in professional singers—he was a good listener and was genuinely interested in other people's conversation and personalities. I found myself telling him, strangely enough in view of what had happened earlier, about Edward. I described Edward at some length to him. I even came near to telling him of that painful episode on the Island when I had hit his hand with a stone, but shame prevented me. Erik listened intently to all this and asked me if Edward was coming to the concert. No, I said, after a moment's hesitation. I could not bring myself to tell him why.

A pity, said Erik and sighed. I should like to meet Edward. You wouldn't like him.

Ah, but that is where you are wrong. I *should* like him. It is Edward who would not like me.

Of course it was true. Edward would not like Erik, at least not on first acquaintance, and Erik would admire Edward for being all the things which he was not. I believe Erik pined for a successful career very largely because it would give him the necessary income to enable him to settle down and marry and found a family, and to abandon the bohemianism which he practised from necessity rather than from choice.

When I got home after tea I found Felix with my mother. I suppose I looked flushed and cheerful, for both of them stared at me.

I tried to catch Felix's eye but he would not respond. I felt my mother and Felix armed against me and spent a wretched evening. After supper the silence in the room became oppressive. Felix was still there, morose and conversational only in abrupt phrases at long intervals, between which he read Norman's latest quarterly with a sneer on his lip. My mother had nothing to say to me. She sat, seemingly absorbed in a light novel, a very slight smile at the corner of her mouth, but most of the time, as I could see, she was not reading. She looked like a cat after she has eaten the mouse at the end of an exhausting chase. At about half-past eight Felix said he must go upstairs and do some work. He disappeared, but no sound came from his piano. I supposed he was composing straight on to the paper. I could picture him up there and ached with longing to be free to go up the stairs to his rooms. The minutes ticked by, my mother's pages rustled occasionally, for she turned them only when she remembered to and her thoughts were obviously elsewhere. I could bear it no longer.

I think I'll go out for a walk, I was about to say, when my brain suddenly devised something better. I got up and went out of the room and across the landing to my bedroom. The drawing-room was on the first floor, and so were both the bedrooms. I closed the door, and put on a coat and a

scarf, and then, standing at the head of the stairs outside the drawing-room, I called loudly to my mother in a voice I was certain Felix would hear:

Mother, I think I'll go out for a bit of a walk.

All right, dear, came her indifferent response. Don't be out too late.

I'll be out at least an hour, I called back defiantly and added in even louder tones as I descended the stairs, I'll walk down the Embankment, I think.

My mother was not interested in where I walked. As I closed the front door behind me and ran down the stone steps I looked up at the top windows of the house. I thought perhaps that Felix would look out from them and give me some sign, but they were empty, the curtains still undrawn and no light showing. I turned my head away despondently and my mother's voice made me jump. I looked up again and she was leaning out of the drawing-room window.

You've got a key, haven't you, Lise? she called.

Yes, Mother.

I may be in bed when you get back. I'm rather tired. Don't come in to say good night. I'll say it now.

Good night, Mother. I'll try to come in quietly.

There's a dear. Good night, bless you!

She was affectionate and motherly at this distance. She waved and smiled and blew me a kiss.

The last time I had walked along the Embankment, it had been with Erik. Then it was growing dusk, but the evening was still and balmy. Tonight it was very dark indeed. There were no stars and a stiff wind was whipping up the black river water into flurries of spray against the arches of the bridge. Hardly anyone was about. It was cold, and I should have walked briskly if I had had no reason for being there but a desire for fresh air and exercise. As it was, I loitered near the gusty bridge, looking back now and again, with diminishing hope, up the long, ill-lit pavements of Bentley Street, to see if I could discern Felix coming down it. The cold prevented me from standing still, so I tramped up and

down the Embankment about fifty yards each way; then I went a little way over the bridge, continually looking back and at last returning very quickly, frightened lest Felix should miss me. I walked back up Bentley Street to the top, and then a sudden panic swept over me that he might have come down to the river a different way and I almost ran the length of that gloomy road and regained the Embankment, panting and breathless, to find not a soul in sight.

At last, above the doleful sound of the wind and the slap of the river water against the bridge, I heard the clocks striking eleven all round me. I had been out nearly an hour and no one had come. I wondered if Felix were not well, or if my mother had waylaid him as he came downstairs, or if he had come indeed and failed to find me—had unaccountably missed me and gone home. After what had happened that morning, after all he had said (of which I recalled only the brief words of tenderness), I had a more than usually sanguine hope that he would follow me out to the river. It had seemed impossible that he should not do so. Had I heard his voice on the stairs telling my mother that he was going out for a walk, I should certainly have taken it for a message to myself and made any excuse to follow him. But he had not followed me, and I came at last to believe that it was because he did not wish to.

I wrapped my coat round me and started to walk home in desolation of spirit. As I rounded the corner of the Square, I saw a man standing near one of the lamps and my heart gave a jump, but it was not Felix. Another night wanderer like myself, from his seedy appearance one of the many down-and-outs who haunted the Pimlico streets and slept a broken sleep on the Embankment. When I reached the house, only one light was on, the hall. I crept up to my bed, and lay awake for a long time, cold and wretched. Once or twice I heard Felix walking about in his sitting-room above my head, and once there was a faint sound of the piano, a ghostly tune, of all things a Bavarian folksong, played so softly that his fingers must have been touching the keys like

feathers. Then his feet padded away from the room above my head to his bedroom, which was out of hearing.

The concert, which had finally been fixed for the beginning of May, was now only three weeks off. I worked hard, though I no longer had Felix's *scena* to work for. I could not, however, have screwed myself up to the point of appearing on the platform without some inner justification, and I found this in my sense of gratitude towards Erik. I had become very fond of him and his support and understanding were worth a great deal to me at this time when the gulf between myself and my mother was growing wider every day, when it was becoming increasingly evident to me that I could not go on living with her the kind of life she wished and expected me to live.

As for my relations with Felix, these were inexplicable to me, but I clung desperately to my own conception of the relationship and I felt that if only I could break away from my mother, I should persuade Felix to come with me. I recognised now without equivocation his enslavement to her, though I was still ignorant of its exact form. I saw him as the half-unwilling recipient of the benefits of patronage, a protégé over-indulged and therefore over-bound to his patroness. I, too, was bound to her. As her daughter, my dependence had some justification, but I believed that Felix was secretly longing to break his bondage as I was longing to break mine. Could I but show him that I was willing, indeed anxious, to rebel also, we might make our escape together. I regarded the concert, therefore, as a necessary evil to be gone through, and was determined that once it was over I would never sing again. I would devote my life to Felix. My shallow-rooted ambition was already dead. I longed only for a security rooted in another being. I could love only Felix, of that I was persuaded, and in him therefore must be the security I sought. I planned how we would go abroad, to Germany, which I knew Felix loved, where I would work, giving English lessons to provide us with some ready money until Felix became better known. I had heard that one could

live cheaply abroad, and I pictured us in a large studio, with a piano filling one end of it and love filling the other. As the plan took firmer shape in my mind, I began to work out just when it would be expedient to broach it to Felix and put it into practice. I came to the conclusion that there was no point in waiting. I would tell him directly the concert was over.

One morning Erik pulled me into the music-room and shut the door carefully behind him. I thought I was in for another of his amorous sorties and resigned myself to the siege, but he turned his back to me, and then said rather huskily:

You couldn't lend me some money, could you, Lise?

I was startled and did not reply quickly enough to prevent him, in a manner most unlike himself, apologising very humbly for asking such a question.

Of course I can lend you some, I said hastily.

You probably know I borrow money frequently. I am what is known, I believe, as a sponger.

Don't be stupid, Erik. I've never called you that.

Ah, but I never sponged on you before. And now I am going to begin. You see, it's rather a large sum. I can sponge successfully for small sums, up to, say, five pounds, but this is rather more. The sensation is new to me.

I haven't very much ready cash, I said. How much is it?

Look, Lise, he said and turned to face me at last. Are you serious? Will you really lend me twenty-five pounds?

Twenty-five pounds?

He took a deep breath. It's for my suit, he said.

For the concert?

He nodded.

I've usually hired the damn thing before. I pawned the only suit I ever owned, and never raised enough cash to redeem it.

You can't hire this time?

Well, look at me, Lise. They've got nothing that really fits me. I've been putting this off and putting it off. I've even

been to Cohen's about hiring my usual suit, but, God, it looks awful. Beside you on the Wigmore Hall platform. No, I can't do it. I'll sell the suit afterwards and probably get back half what we pay for it.

I'll give you the money on one condition, I said.

What's that? I hate conditions.

That you don't sell the suit and that you don't pay me back either.

What d'you mean, Lise?

Exactly what I say.

Oh, balls! Don't be a fool. Of course I must pay it back.

No, I don't want you to.

Why ever not? Erik was more interested in my reaction than in any expression of gratitude.

Directly this concert is over, I am leaving.

Leaving your mother, do you mean?

Leaving here. Leaving our whole life. I shall go away, right away from England.

Oh, Lise! Erik's face went woebegone. Oh, God, I shall miss you.

He put his arms round me, and nuzzled his face against my breast. It was a familiar gambit and I ignored it. I knew he was only playing for time. He was not used to a situation in which a lender told him he didn't want the money back. He was still trying to cope with this.

Won't you want money any more? Is my Lise going into a nunnery? he mumbled in muffled tones.

No, not a nunnery, but abroad, away. And I shan't need the money. I want you to keep it, I have got a little of my own from my father. I want you to keep the suit as a—as a kind of memento of our association.

Association? Oh, Lise, how cold a word that is!

Of our love, then, I said, kissing him. And going on quickly before he got sentimental, I said:

I shall like to think of you wearing it at concerts, with a red carnation in your buttonhole, and there will be concerts, lots of concerts. I am sure there will be.

Erik said nothing.

If this concert is a success, I went on, exerting myself, it will mean other engagements for you. And you will get known, and I shall read about you in the newspapers when I am—when I am abroad. Perhaps even see you when you come to foreign cities to sing.

What nonsense you are talking, said Erik coolly. I will tell you exactly what will happen. There will be six lines in the daily papers, five of which will be a tribute to your father and the sixth a tribute to our accompanist.

Oh no, Erik!

Oh yes, Lise! I know the critics.

Then why were you so anxious to do this concert, if you knew all along that it would lead nowhere?

Oh, well, one always hopes, I suppose.

He seemed gloomy and dispirited. I wrote him a cheque for twenty-five pounds and he thanked me rather morosely and left the house. He did not refer to it again and at our rehearsals, from then on, there was a distance in his manner which I found hurtful. The old intimacy was gone. I suppose he was trying to reconcile himself to the fact that he would not see anything of me in future.

As the days drew past, I became more and more pre-occupied with my secret plans for escape. The more I thought of them, the more melodramatic they became. Having started as a simple scheme which included a solemn farewell to my mother and an open departure in a taxi for Victoria, with all my belongings carefully packed and every arrangement decently ordered, they had now become far more clandestine and their ordering less definite. I had no idea where we should go. One morning, boldly venturing, I went up to Trafalgar Square and called on a travel agency, where I collected a huge sheaf of coloured leaflets about Germany, and several time-tables which I could hardly understand. I looked at the leaflets secretly in my room. They did not seem to me very helpful. Most of them were, of course, purely for the holiday-maker. But, after all, could

not our first few days of escape take the form of a honeymoon? I debated the merits of two or three German towns. The practicalities of our elopement faded into a romantic dream in which Felix and I, living presumably on the extremely small private income left me by my father, supplemented by my earnings, would live in a perpetual honeymoon of devotion on my side and creative activity on his. The unpleasant realities of the now imminent concert drove me, I suppose, even further into my romantic dream than I would otherwise have ventured. Moreover, I received little corrective from actual contact with Felix, for I saw very little of him. My mother was in a fever of activity, the house was invaded by florists, dressmakers and strange young men whom my mother had gathered to her side as ushers and programme-sellers—she had insisted on organising all this herself—and Felix kept aloof in his room and inaccessible to me, for I had few moments when I was left alone and free to go up to him.

One thing I omitted to do, though I knew well enough that it had to be done—procure a passport. Over and over again I planned to go to the Passport Office to get it, and every time, with secret relief, I accepted engagements and commissions for my mother which made it impossible. My failure to take this practical step was, I know now, the final step in the victory of that private personality which I was so lamentably long in recognising.

On the evening of the concert, when I was dressed and waiting in the house for the taxi to take me to the hall, Felix made his appearance. He was in evening dress and looked wonderfully handsome. My mother gazed at him approvingly.

You look extremely well, Felix, she said.

Felix glanced at me, turned away to my mother, who smiled at him, gave her a blank stare and looked back to me again.

My mother began to speak. Evidently she was saying in other words what she had said already, but Felix ignored her and, speaking directly to me, he said:

These, with all my wishes for tonight, and held out a small spray of flowers.

My mother intercepted them neatly.

Oh, Felix, how pretty! But not for Lise's gown, I'm afraid. She's got one already. We'll put them in water.

But I'd rather wear these, I objected, anxiously.

They won't harmonise, said my mother firmly. They simply won't harmonise.

It was all over in a moment, over so quickly that I hardly had time to feel the pain her action caused me. In any case, after the first rapid thrust, my sensations were flooded over with gratitude and adoration towards Felix for the thought that had prompted it. Once I was safely in the cab with my mother, now mercifully silent, I was able to give my mind to the little scene, and see in it something quite new. Felix's words, These, with all my wishes for tonight, took on fresh meaning. Accustomed to think of myself and Felix secretly as almost one being, I had little difficulty in ascribing to him the hopes and designs I had myself. Fatuously convinced of our telepathic union, his words appeared to me the outward sign that he, too, intended tonight to be the turning-point in our relationship. It was tonight that I was to come to him, and together we were to make our escape, to leave before I even saw the notices of the concert. What a dramatic and thrilling step that seemed to me and how utterly appropriate a gesture, this severing myself at one blow from my past life.

When we were waiting in the artists' room, Felix was among two or three others who came in. It was impossible to say anything to him alone, but, among the formal good wishes of the little group, his "Lise, tonight is going to be a turning-point for you. May all go well" seemed to me to have a tremendous hidden significance, and his look, though guarded, held something of intimacy and promise.

He was about to go when my mother checked him.

I can't leave it too late to come out, she said. I'd better come now. Erik, I leave Lise in your hands. Come, Felix.

She slipped her white-gloved arm over his, and disappeared through the glass doors of the artists' room. Erik and I were alone, but for the official at the door waiting to summon us in.

The concert itself was the most curious, unreal thing I have ever experienced. I expected to feel nervous, and so, a little, I was, but I was insulated against my normal fears by the plans boiling in my brain, plans which were nothing to do with the concert itself and which therefore neither added to nor diminished any of the natural emotions arising from public performance. Except in so far as I was physically nervous, my mind was really unscathed. It was dwelling with ardour and hope on the events of the next few hours, when I should lay my plan before Felix, certain of its acceptance, and find with him my release. I could not detect in myself any interest in the concert or in my own performance, and this lack of interest had a special quality of indifference to actual standards which made it quite possible that I should sing badly. It no longer seemed to matter. Erik was very nervous and not a little nonplussed by my attitude.

Why aren't you panic-stricken? he muttered angrily. I must go and pee again. Excuse me.

He left the room hurriedly and, alone with the photographs of famous singers, I found myself suddenly thinking of Edward. He would not be here, of course. It did not matter therefore how badly I sang. Not even for Erik would I exert myself. I felt a presentiment that I was going to make a poor showing, but there was now nothing I could do about it. I was only relieved that Edward was not there. I should have hated him to have heard me making an exhibition of myself. Somehow, I had no feeling of this kind about Felix. With him I could be entirely myself. I had not apparently considered my artistic conscience as part of myself. Presumably it was too undeveloped.

So I walked on to the platform with Erik, feeling cool and indifferent to the mass of faces in front of me, and inwardly exalted at the trick I was about to play on this singers' world. One face I saw and recognised in the stalls, Norman's. His

red-headed girl was with him and both were staring impudently at me. The girl said something and Norman slapped her on the arm. All this I saw as I walked to the front of the platform, and I looked down at the girl from my superior position and gave her a radiant smile. I could not dislike her any more. She meant nothing to me.

The notes of the first song came from the piano and Erik's arm pressed mine fiercely. I moved a little farther away from him and began to sing. An extraordinary and unwonted air of detachment came over me, a serene conviction of total irrelevance. I was no longer involved. Because, through the last weeks, I had been trained to sing these songs, I sang them now, and no better, no worse, than I had sung at rehearsals. I was not inspired to any supreme effort, for there was nothing to inspire me. I was not reduced to nervous faltering, or to that stiffening of the muscles which is the misfortune of the uneasy and inexperienced singer. I was anxious, certainly, to get to the end of it all, and I hurried Erik a little at one point. I heard him whisper comfortingly, Take it easy. I could have laughed. I *was* taking it easy, with the deceptive ease of the somnambulist.

At the end of the Wagner group there was a generous burst of applause and I felt for a moment a sudden warmth spread over me. I realised exactly what I was doing and where I was, and the flush of extreme pleasure was followed by a panic so severe that I wondered for a moment if my legs would support me as I walked off the platform. I caught the eye of the impeccable accompanist. It flashed a look of alliance and instantly I repudiated it, resented it, almost as an impertinence. It spoke so clearly of his rather surprised approbation. The hands of applause reached out to claim me for that world I had resolved to leave and I felt more fearfully my inexperience and responsibility than I had felt it yet. I sat in the artists' room, shaking.

But you were splendid! cried Erik, misinterpreting my behaviour. Don't worry. The worst is over. You'll find it easier in the second half.

I listened to him and made an effort of concentration. I forced myself to think beyond the concert. Willingly would I have transferred my fears to that other ordeal, when I should have to tell Felix of my plan, but where this was concerned I had the absurd confidence of the utterly inexperienced, and my confidence was sustained by incidents which had validity for me, because I had totally misunderstood them. I drew strength from them now, shed my nervous fever, and returned to the platform with a renewed sense of detachment.

Long after it was all over I read the criticisms and was surprised to see how comparatively well I had sung. It was like reading about a total stranger.

My mother was in her element. She was photographed, she made statements to the press, she signed autographs, she sketched out my future in terms that made me hug myself with joy. Study with Elizabeth Schumann? Little did my mother know. Destined for the Vienna opera? No, my destiny lay elsewhere. The only tenuous cord which held me to the present moment was my affection for Erik. I was glad to see him given congratulations, and hoped sincerely that he would get a good press. Of Felix I saw nothing and wondered why he had not come round to the artists' room to speak to me. My mother enlightened me. She had posted him in the hall itself to keep away unwanted persons.

There are always people hanging about who want to get something out of you, she remarked sagely.

When most of my visitors had departed, she told me that she had arranged a little celebration. I knew that for her this was the happiest moment she had experienced since my father was alive. I felt even a twinge of conscience that I was so soon to destroy her hopes in me.

The champagne corks popped, the sandwiches, so impeccably cut, were circulated. Erik ate, as usual, like a horse. Norman stood, glass in hand, and lectured to a small group of admirers, trying out what he was going to write about the concert in *New Music*. Dulcie giggled and finally had to be

laid down upon a couch, when Norman changed the subject of his discourse from my concert to Dulcie, and discussed her eloquently, point by point, as though she were a prize animal. Sadie Matthews was there, non-committal and massive, and two or three other agents, not one of whom would make the slightest response to my mother's fervid questioning as to their opinion. But they drank her champagne and seemed very friendly and she told me in a whisper that she was sure they had been impressed and were favourably inclined. She could read an agent's mind like a book, she informed me. And there too was Felix, characteristically enough with his white scarf still round his collar—he had had to go out once or twice to deal with some autograph hunters. It was just like a dozen other parties at our house. Only the setting was different, and the quality of the champagne.

Looking round it I made a conscious inner salutation, a private hail and farewell to the whole world it represented. Only on one small group did my eyes linger for more than a moment, in admiration and regret: the handful of artists, some of them distinguished singers, who had honoured me with their presence at this concert. If I could have joined them knowing with any confidence that I might one day reach their stature I should not perhaps have wished so ardently to leave this life behind me. But I knew my own world. It was not in me to attain those Olympian heights. I should remain with the Normans and the Eriks, dependent on the favours of Sadie Matthews and her like.

At last the party was over and we went down to the street. More than a little drunk, Erik took the red carnation out of his buttonhole and gave it to me.

A keepsake, he said rather thickly.

I have it still. It is pressed between the leaves of *Il Trovatore*, which I have never opened again since I sang the *Miserere* with Erik that night.

I was a little elevated by the champagne myself and by a feeling of triumph over the success of the concert which added a kind of gaudy decoration to the façade of my secret

design. As we drove home in the taxi, Mother, Erik, Felix and I, I watched Felix with absorption and imprinted on my mind every detail of features which, I thought, would soon be so close and familiar that I should hardly notice them. Felix wore his hair more like an Englishman now, though rather long, and he had shaved off his moustache. His skin was very fair, but his eyebrows, as often in very blonde people, were dark. I thought of the moment when I should be able to kiss every part of his face, eyes, forehead, cheeks and mouth, with an inner ecstasy which, heightened by champagne, induced my thoughts to take a more specifically sexual direction than was usual. I was longing to devote myself to him, to give him my undemanding love and the happiness he so clearly lacked in the exacting patronage of my mother. He would not be my protégé. He would be my master. He would not be compelled to work in an artistic milieu for which he had no sympathy. He would create his own, and attract to himself the discerning admiration and support of true artists.

We reached home at last. Farewells were said and Erik departed for his attic. When we went into the hall there was silence between us. There seemed nothing I could say.

Well, bed for us all, I think, said my mother, whose eyes were very bright. She did not look as if she were ready for sleep. I was worried. How could I be certain that she had really dropped off? Would it be better to postpone the whole thing?

Yes, bed, said my mother again. We shall have a very heavy day tomorrow. The telephone will ring and there will be reporters to interview. I've arranged two or three appointments, so you'd better get some sleep, Lise.

And you, too, said Felix, looking enigmatically at my mother.

Oh, me! laughed my mother. I never need sleep. I shall probably be up half the night—thinking, planning . . .

So we parted, and after I was in bed my mother came to

my room. She sat on the edge of my bed—an unusual thing for her—and took my hand.

I am so proud of you, she said, looking down on me with satisfaction. So very proud. We shall have a splendid life from now on.

She hesitated and then continued, finding her words with apparent difficulty:

There is one thing lacking in all this, Lise.

I looked questioning. For me there was nothing lacking now.

You have no father.

I no longer had any feeling for my father beyond admiration, and this mention of him, in somewhat emotional tones, embarrassed me.

Our home needs a man, went on my mother very rapidly. Either you will have to find a husband or I must!

Oh, marriage, I mumbled. I did not believe that my mother and I meant the same thing by the word marriage. I wished she would go. I had much to think about and a decision to make, for I was still not certain that it would be best to seek Felix out that very night to tell him the plan. So I leaned forward suddenly and kissed my mother with affection—after all, it might be the last time I ever saw her, and I felt a certain admixture of guilt and genuine filial affection.

Surprised, my mother kissed me back.

My little Lise! she said. Now go off to sleep quickly. You must be very tired. And she tiptoed from the room as though I were already sleeping.

Alone in the darkness I began to think furiously. Now that the time had come to give my dream some reality, I found myself reluctant to make the conversion. Perhaps some fear that the reality would never come up to the dream made me hesitate. Perhaps I was tired. At all events, I suddenly fell asleep, with my mind still wavering.

I woke at about half-past four. It was fairly light outside with a grey, still sky, cloudless, and a barge was sounding its

horn on the river. I got out of bed and went to the window. During my sleep, my mind had made its resolve and I had awoken with a clear determination to go. The memory of the photographers last night, the applause, the champagne, and the men and women so alien to me, so meaningless, filled me with repugnance and even fear. But the fear was behind me; I looked over my shoulder towards it and felt my footsteps quicken.

Now too, in this early morning, a time when I had rarely been awake before, I found myself very vulnerable. I stood at the window and shook in the grip of emotions that I had hardly been aware of till that moment. Those stirrings of the blood which Erik had aroused in me so readily, and which I had repudiated and thrust away, returned to overwhelm me. The details of my plan, intended to be discussed so carefully with Felix, were flooded by violence of a desire for Felix himself which at last, long pent up, I allowed to take possession of me. I had known it was there, of course, but my innocence and my idealism had combined to thrust it out of range. Why should I not indulge it now? For soon Felix and I would be escaping together. Now, surely, was the moment for me to go to him, to pour out my love for him. There would be no need for words. Our love would find release, and in both of us the mutual desire to continue this love, and enjoy it in perpetuity, would lead naturally to the formulation of plans. There was also another and subtler reason why I longed so ardently to go to Felix now and gain an immediate fulfilment of my passion. This was a sentimental regard for those upstairs rooms of his which we should never see again. There, secretly, and hedged about with difficulties, our love had taken root and grown. For me, although my blood was clamouring for something more substantial, those moments of ideal passion spent in that room, sitting perhaps at Felix's knees with no word spoken between us, would always remain precious. With part of me, I could hardly bear to say farewell to them and begin a life which held so many uncertainties, but I had reached a

stage when I realised that Felix and I must either take a decisive step forward or risk losing everything.

I opened my door stealthily. I did not shut it again, but left a handkerchief wedged in the lintel to prevent it slamming in a sudden draught. I was barefooted. My mother's door, I found to my surprise, was slightly ajar, and I held my breath as I passed it to reach the stairs. Common sense told me that a stair might creak less if I trod on the inner edge of it, next to the wall. I crept up the flight, pressing my feet lightly and hesitatingly on each stair to try it. There was not a sound in the house. The stairs groaned noisily at the top where they turned round, but I was farther from my mother's room now and she did not stir or call out. She would be sleeping deeply. I knew my mother could sleep through most noises. Felix's sitting-room door was also slightly ajar. I pushed it open and entered the grey twilight room. The piano was open and I stood by it for a moment, wondering whether I would waken Felix by striking a few notes softly. The opening bars of the Rilke song. But I hesitated, and as I stood there, my hand resting softly on the cool ivory of the keys, there swept over me the overwhelming realisation that I was in Felix's rooms at half-past four in the morning; that I had but to take a few steps to find him, to stand over his bed. The strain of creeping up the stairs which had kept my body taut and my will at a stretch to control my limbs, was suddenly released. With an ardour that seemed to melt my limbs in an alembic of fiery joy, I almost ran through the open, uncurtained archway into his bedroom. In the light of the growing dawn I could see the bed clearly, the double shape beneath the clothes, the two heads upon the pillow. My mother turned in her sleep, and her face, flushed and drowsy, rolled sideways so that its beautiful, still profile lay revealed to my view. There was upon her face an utter content and satiety such as I had never seen in anyone's expression before. She did not wake, but Felix opened his eyes. He lay there, staring at me, and did not stir. For a moment we looked at each other, while the ecstasy I had felt

as I came into his rooms drained away from me, almost palpably, as though my blood were being sucked from my body, leaving me so cold that I shivered uncontrollably. Felix said not a word, and I turned away at last, and, dragging my feet painfully, leaning my hand on chair, table, piano and lintel, I reached the stairs. For a moment I sat down on the top step, and then the memory of how often I had sat there in the early days, when to enter Felix's room had demanded some courage on my part, came over me and released in me a gentler misery which helped to relieve the tension of my pain in facile tears. When I reached my room I was able to weep, and when I had wept I was able to act.

I kept a large suitcase on top of my wardrobe, and this I took down and filled with all the clothes and personal belongings I thought I should want. I locked it and put the key in my handbag. I would send for the case when I knew where I was going to live. I wrote a short note to my mother, simply telling her that I had resolved not to sing any more, that I should try to find myself a job and in the meantime would live on the money I had. All the time I was doing this, a thought was taking form in my mind, which, as soon as I had carried out these practical matters, I took out into the light of day and surveyed calmly. I knew it to be the only course I could take. Edward was at the Portman Hotel. To Edward I would go.

I left the house soon after six o'clock and as I walked through the empty streets I felt a curious and not unpleasant lightness in the head. The misery was no longer acute. My thoughts were numbed and silent. I was aware of little else but the immediate scene around me, sharp-etched in the early morning light, the solitary milk cart standing at a street corner, the sharp rattle of a shutter, the long shadow of a lamp-post on the pavement. I walked all the way from Pimlico to Marble Arch, and then I found a restaurant in the Edgware Road and went in to have some breakfast. By this time I was not feeling too well, my legs were not quite under control and my hands trembled so much that I found

it difficult to hold my cup of coffee. I spent some time in the restaurant. At last, thinking that Edward would be sure to be up by now, I walked through the quiet eighteenth-century streets towards the Portman Hotel. I had begged a piece of paper in the restaurant, a shop bill, actually, and on it I wrote:

I am waiting downstairs, Lise.

I folded it over and addressed it to Mr. Edward Yeo. I went up to the office pigeon-hole and asked for him, laying my little note on the counter.

Mr. Yeo? said the porter and looked down his list.

Left last night, late, Miss. Had dinner here, had a room booked, but didn't actually use it.

I had not expected this. I felt painfully hurt and turned away. I suppose I looked pretty pale, for the porter came out to me and said with solicitude:

If you'll take a seat, Miss, one minute, I can give you the address, if that's any good.

No, thank you, I answered mechanically. I know his address.

So Edward had gone. My burden was my own and now I had time to feel its weight. In utter despair I stood on the pavement outside the Portman, waiting for a bus to take me to Paddington. I no longer had any certain plan. I no longer felt that I must find Edward. But it was imperative that I went somewhere. I could not walk the streets of London indefinitely. I must move, even if I had no chosen direction. Some vehicle must carry me, and because it was necessary to have a ticket I took one to Lodmouth. I caught the 9.15 train with no clear idea of what I should do when I got to Dorset.

Once in the train and subjected to the rhythm of the carriage wheels, my thoughts, like the patterns of a kaleidoscope, gradually settled themselves into a fixed design, the scene in Felix's bedroom on which I had gazed early that morning. I recalled details of this of which I was unaware at

the time: that my mother's new silk dressing-gown, bought before she went on holiday to Bavaria, was draped over the end of the bed; that her watch was lying on the bedside-table; that her slippers and Felix's were tumbled over each other at one side of the bed. This I contemplated, recalling every detail. On this I dwelt until I had extracted from it the maximum of pain. A shake of the kaleidoscope, and there came before my mental vision earlier scenes, scenes in which I saw myself as another person, seated in Felix's room, talking to him very seriously of my mother and her plans for me, and his faintly mocking face looking at mine intently, offering no comment, merely watching. Scenes in which I saw Felix among my mother's guests, with that mask of polite indifference veiling his contempt. A very recent occasion, only a few hours old, though it already seemed an eternity away, when he had handed me the spray of flowers and said, These, with all my wishes for tonight. This last scene pained me most of all. I wondered bitterly where my mother had put those flowers. I felt an overwhelming regret that I had not looked for them and brought them with me. I poured out my grief on those flowers and for miles of the journey I could think of nothing else.

I arrived in Lodmouth soon after midday. I wanted no lunch. I did not know where to go. I had no design or purpose. The train had ceased to convey me anywhere and it was necessary that I should find another means of motion. Slowly I wandered through the back streets and found myself at the harbour bridge at last. To the left lay the quay, where I had sat and opened Felix's first letter to me. To the right lay the road to the Island, and buses were drawing up at the stop a little farther along. I got on to one of them and paid my fare to the Island.

Do you go as far as the Point? I asked.

Yes, the bus went to the lighthouse. It was only a few minutes' walk farther on to the Point, the conductor informed me, adding, You can go up to the lighthouse. Sixpence. It's worth it. Lovely view.

The bus lurched its way over the neck of the isthmus. A high wind buffeted it and curled the waters of the harbour roads on my left. We reached the Island. The bus began the long ascent through the town, past grey cottages built so steeply above one another that the door-sill of one was level with the eaves of the cottage below. The engine roared and a smell of hot metal filled the bus. Out on the top the wind caught us again and a fine white dust blew through the windows and settled on our faces and clothes. The bus bowled along the white island roads and the dusty quarrymen leaned on their picks and gazed at us like ghosts.

It was a Wednesday afternoon and there were a few couples wandering round the lighthouse and some even crawling like bees round its lofty gallery. But no one had gone down to the Point. In those days there were no bathing huts or tea shacks there. Simply the lighthouse and a few cottages. The land ended abruptly in the sea. Ahead was only the finely-ruled horizon. I sat among the rocks, high enough up to be out of the spray which rose in clouds between my eyes and the sun. The waves boomed and thundered and the only human sound was the occasional roar of a motor-bike engine arriving or departing from the lighthouse. During the late afternoon two or three people came down to the Point and gazed at the tremendous monotony of the scene. They fell into silence before it and after scrambling about a little among the rocks departed to find tea in one of the cottages.

When I heard my name called above the tumultuous groaning of the sea, I thought it must be Edward, for the voice was drained of character as though the wind had blown it bare. I leapt to my feet and saw approaching me over the salty turf the figure of Felix. What prompted me I don't know—my actions that day were not within the normal control of my will—but I ran as fast as I could to the higher ground above the rocks which would take me over the Point itself on to the farther side and out of sight. I heard Felix's voice again and hurried the faster. My feet, in their town

shoes, slipped over the tough grass, and I found myself among the rocks. I picked my way over them, jumping from one to another, or scrambling on my hands and knees. On this side tamarisk grew close down to the sea and I had to force my way through it, pressing back with my hands the springy branches that closed behind me like waves. The soft feathery fronds caressed my face and brushed my sides. I was hardly aware of the difference when Felix and I at last lay panting among the bushes.

I did not pursue you for this, said Felix bitterly and withdrew himself.

For what, then? I cried and caught his hand. You *have* pursued me, and if not for this—— Felix! I can forget what I saw.

I suppose I believed what I was saying. With Felix filling my vision and drawing up towards him in a kind of eddy my trembling senses, I think I really believed it, and thought that this was a beginning not an ending. As always, Felix's actual presence had the power of setting my emotional mechanism driving so fast that it drowned the milder throbbing of my mental turbine.

We lay apart on the rough dark-green sea grass, with the tamarisk bending double in the wind over our shoulders, and glared at each other like a couple of animals. Slowly Felix sat up and, lighting a cigarette, said in matter-of-fact tones:

This seems to be the end of things.

He was looking towards the Point as he spoke, but I knew that he meant more than that.

Why, oh, why? Can't it be the beginning? Felix, let's go away. That was what I was coming to ask you this morning. To go away with me and leave this accursed London life, and make a new one somewhere else.

Really? said Felix. Have you not grown up since this morning, Lise?

It makes no difference to me, I said stubbornly.

Have you really seen nothing of what has been going on under your nose all this time?

If you mean—my mother—it makes no difference to us. Only to my feelings for her. You can't love her, Felix, you can't.

I can, you know. In my way, I do.

The palpable world seemed here remote. I felt an awareness of the vast spatial envelope in which I lay—the sea which lapped almost at my feet receded into immeasurable distances, the air I breathed vanished, cloud upon cloud, into inconceivable cerulean depths. Felix, whose face was familiar as air, whose hand, like the sea, I had only to reach out and touch, seemed to contain within himself a whole cosmography of which I had only glimpsed the very rim. I had not even the map to this incomprehensible world. Even on the outer edge where I wandered I found myself utterly lost. Perhaps it was in an effort to maintain my precarious foothold in it that I questioned him, with assumed practicality. How had he known I should be here? Why had he pursued me? Did my mother know he was doing so?

My mother was, he answered, very anxious about me. She thought at first that I must have gone round to Erik's.

She has several times told me you were having an affair with Erik, interposed Felix, dryly. She was, if it interests you, partly gratified by your bohemianism and partly ashamed of your choice.

Felix had been despatched to Erik's room to find out if I was there, and, finding I was not, he had telephoned my mother to say that he had another idea and would follow it up, but he refused to explain what was in his mind.

So she did not know he was here? No one knew. We were alone, not merely by virtue of our solitary position between wind and sea on the rocky edge of this promontory, but isolated by the ignorance of all other souls as to our whereabouts. I could have wished this moment to go on for eternity, and held out my hands to Felix in a final appeal. But he would not take them.

Why did you trouble to come? I asked bitterly.

To make sure you were safe, first of all, he answered, and

not merely now, but for the future. I am taking you to Edward, he went on, speaking with deliberation. I went to the Yeos as soon as I got down here. He seemed to think that this might be a likely place to find you. As for why I came to Lodmouth at all, I suppose it was instinct. I could not think of anywhere else that you would be likely to use as a covert.

It was an extraordinary sensation to sit there, listening to this voice of Felix, a hollow, impersonal voice, like the stutter of the telephone-wires I had heard earlier that afternoon, sitting alone near the lighthouse.

I think you are owed an explanation, he went on. Oh, not of last night. Such things are hardly worth explaining. You would have known that sooner or later. But—we both have a future to live. Yours . . . do you know what yours will be? I suppose you do, since your instinct brought you here as though to your home. You will marry Edward Yeo. But I? Don't be surprised, Lise—or perhaps you won't be, now. I am going to marry your mother. I am at least ten years younger than she is. It is what convention calls a thoroughly unsuitable match—which is of course a recommendation to your mother. I have no doubt that Norman will be my best man. I tell you this now, not because I have actually asked your mother to marry me, but because I know that I *shall* marry her. It is—ordained. And I want—I want to shock you now. To hurt you finally and irrevocably. To give you a mortal thrust and throw away the weapon. You need never think of either of us again. You know what is going to happen, not only the marriage but the life after the marriage. There is nothing for you to speculate about. Nothing for painful conjecture. You need not even be afraid that you will be reminded of me by references in the newspapers. We shall probably command a paragraph or two for the next few weeks and then all interest will die down. One cannot live on the name of Reinhart for ever. I am afraid your mother will not find the name of Harradine very profitable, but as far as you are concerned it will insure a merciful

obscurity. And after all she does not need money, and she can lead an active life gathering around me a *côterie* who will appreciate my compositions.

Don't marry her, Felix, I pleaded. Don't marry her. Go away to Germany, anywhere. Start again. Compose as you want to.

As I want to? Ah, Lise, do you still cherish that illusion? One cannot start again. Learn to surrender, Lise. Only surrender. Any other life is false. I shall never compose a line worth remembering. Without your mother I should have had to support myself as a teacher of the piano to little schoolgirls, smelling of sweat and ink-stains. I don't choose to. Your mother will give me all I need in return for a spurious artistic life. It will satisfy her, and—as long as I don't believe in it myself—it will satisfy me. It's enough.

You think that's enough? I cried passionately. I would rather put my head in a gas oven.

Ten years ago, he said, I might have done that. Now (he shrugged his shoulders) I've come to terms with myself. And there is something else. You will never believe that I love your mother. But I do. You must try to understand that.

I was silent. Something more was needed. Felix supplied it.

I have to say this. Perhaps it should have been said before. Listen, Lise: I have never loved you.

I got up quickly.

Will you take me back to Lodmouth? I said. Gladly would I have gone by myself, but I was feeling ill and frightened of the journey.

I will take you back to Edward.

No, there is no need. I would rather go to Edward by myself. Just take me across the isthmus to Lodmouth. To the station.

We crossed the Island by bus and I was hardly conscious of Felix beside me. I fastened my attention upon the landmarks which were familiar to me. There was the cottage where the woman had been hanging out her washing. She

was standing in the garden now, calling to a rough-haired mongrel puppy which was rolling on the lawn by the gate. The men from the quarries were standing about like monoliths in heavy-shouldered, stone-grey groups. The square at Easton, with its patch of whitened grass, was alive with children playing and the cottage doors were open, their mothers standing watching them and gossiping with their neighbours. It had been the same when I passed them that afternoon in August. It seemed that they had never moved in nine months. It was I who had changed my direction.

At last we reached Lodmouth station. It was a quarter to six.

Edward will still be at the shop, I said. I think I'll go up there.

Then I'll say good-bye, said Felix.

We shook hands formally, not looking at each other. Both of us were saying good-bye to more than a person. I saw him walk through the barrier towards the London train. I did not wait to see him enter it and he did not turn round. I left the station and went out into the street. The shutters were going up in some of the shops, and the pavements were full of work-people walking home. I had a sudden panic that Edward might be leaving the shop and hurried my steps towards the High Street. I came up into it at last, and, a little way on the left-hand side, stood the bow-windowed shop with

CLEMENT YEO AND SON  
Jewellers  
Est. 1783.

I walked slowly up to the window and noticed that the time, as shown by the countryman with his dog, was exactly six o'clock. I was still standing there five minutes later when Edward came out. The town clock chimed the hour.

Five minutes late as usual, said Edward with asperity, listening to its chimes.

